

ANOTHER NEW SERIAL THIS WEEK.

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LOOKING UP SUDDENLY I FOUND A YOUNG MAN STANDING BY MY SIDE.

## A HAPPY MISTAKE.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

I BELONG to an eminently genteel family—that much has been impressed on me from earliest childhood. I don't think the gentility of my descent ever brought me any tangible good, and I can well remember many a youthful pleasure and amusement of which it robbed me. I had three maiden aunts ever ready to repeat their warning, "Janet, you are a Kirkwood, and must not disgrace your family." I never remember any celebrated act of any dead-and-gone Kirkwood which entitled him to be held up as a model for his posterity. In fact, in spite of many a question put to my three aunts, I never elicited the slightest thing any of my ancestors had done to make me proud of them; and yet

the homage to their memory was exacted from the time I was five years old, and forbidden to ride on a "merry-go-round" at the village fair, because it was not like a Kirkwood, until, more than fifteen years later, I was exiled from my native land for the simple reason it was necessary for me to earn my own living; and no female Kirkwood having yet degenerated into a bread-winner, it was decreed by the family that, since work I must, the further removed from them I did so the better.

But I am anticipating. My life until the time of my exile is very briefly described as dull. A "study in grey" is not a bad term for it. My parents died when I was three years old, and I fell to the care of my three aunts, with just sufficient money to give me a good education, and provide for me in all respects until I was twenty-one.

My mother (she was not a Kirkwood, you see, so could not be expected to think as they did) had thought by that time I should be old enough to earn my own living. She was—I have heard

from strangers—a woman of great sense and decision, and she preferred for her only child to be brought up with a liberal education as her capital, to the alternative of investing the one thousand pounds which was all she had to leave me, and letting me subsist as well as I could on the forty pounds a-year it would have brought me in.

How my aunts condemned her; they had little more than forty pounds a year themselves; but the three incomes clubbed together, and in a little cottage they accepted, rent free, from a cousin—(N.B. There was nothing lowering to the Kirkwood pride in accepting things from relatives, it was honest work which went against the grain)—contrived to keep up a very respectable appearance.

If only my mother had been of their way of thinking there would have been another forty pounds a-year added to the establishment. They would have taught me themselves; and though it was twenty years since they opened a lesson-book, and education was not what it is now,

surely they knew enough to teach a mite of a child of three years old! I fairly believe my poor mother's will had to answer for the very scant affection shown me by all my aunts.

The will was faithfully carried out. A lawyer, my mother's tried and trusted friend, was my guardian, and he apportioned my modest fortune as seemed best to him. For seven years I lived with my aunts, the interest of my little income being paid them for my support; then I was sent for five years to a good English school, and for five more to a French one, where (I fancy unknown to my aunts) the terms were considerably reduced in consideration of my instructing the French pupils in English. Finally, I came home, aged twenty and a half, with the best education that could be provided for me, and a hundred-and-fifty pounds in ready money.

"If you take my advice," said my lawyer friend, when I spent a day or two at his house in Bedford-place before joining my aunts, "you will make over the fifty to the old ladies, and spend the next six months with them. You ought to take breathing-space before you start on anything. Just vegetate at Fairleigh till next September; then, when you've made up your mind what you'd like to do, drop me a line, and I'll come down and talk to the old ladies. They're very foolish women, but they're the nearest flesh and blood you've got, and as their little savings must come to you some day if you keep in with them, I think you'd better put up with their peculiarities, and not quarrel."

"I don't want their money!" I said, with all the indignant independence of my twenty years. "I wouldn't stoop to thank them for it, Mr. Grant—I wouldn't, really!"

He smiled, not unkindly, but as one who rather pitied my impulsiveness.

"I don't think you need trouble your head about it at present. Miss Kirkwood is only fifty-seven, and her sisters younger; they all look like long-lived women. I fancy, Janet, by the time they are called upon to resign their money your views may be changed."

"Never!"

"Earning one's own living sounds delightful independence, Janet, but, as a matter of fact, it is hard work for a woman."

"It is a hundred times better than useless, pretentious lives like my three aunts."

"Possibly, but I fancy you look at it through rose-coloured spectacles. When you are thirty, and have been earning your own living for ten years, I doubt if 'work' will seem to you quite so glorious."

"I shall never repent my choice. Mr. Grant, how can women make up their minds to live like my aunts; they must have been young and active once! How could they bring themselves to be content to live out all their days in the idleness of genteel pauperism!"

"I don't suppose they meant to live out their lives in Rose Cottage, Janet," said Mr. Grant, with a comical little laugh.

"But—"

Miss Kirkwood was a very handsome woman, and both her sisters were fairly good-looking. No doubt they expected to marry."

"That's worse than all!"

"My dear girl, don't grow into a claimant of 'Women's Rights,' or a rouser against matrimony. I can stand almost any other of your vagaries, but I can't see your mother's child turn into that."

I stared at him.

"I don't want to. I dare say some women are quite right to marry, but I think it's perfectly despicable to look on marriage as a means of securing a home, and that's what you implied about the three aunts."

"Did I?"

"Certainly. You said they expected to be married, and believed Rose Cottage to be nothing but a temporary arrangement."

"Most women expect to be married."

"Then they ought not."

"Don't you?" inquired the old gentleman, looking at me half-comicly. "You know, Janet, you'll never be a beauty like your eldest aunt, but still—"

I interrupted him angrily, and said no more.

"I don't want to be a beauty, and I don't expect to be married. I think if anyone proposed to me I should think he had gone out of his mind."

On which my guardian laughed till he could hardly stop himself, and after that we decided I should go down to Fairleigh the very next day, my aunts having duly signified the pleasure it would give them.

I don't think up to this time the thought of my personal appearance had ever particularly troubled me. The last years had been busy—full of constant and agreeable occupation, and I had never seriously considered whether I was plain or the reverse; but the day on which I was to start for Rose Cottage I took an unnecessarily prolonged view of myself in the handsome pier glass which adorned Mr. Grant's spare room, and wondered for the first time in my life what verdict a stranger would have passed upon me.

I was of middle height and rather thin, but my complexion was fresh and rosy; my dark-grey eyes sparkled with health and spirits, so that no one could have pronounced me delicate. My features were unremarkable, except the eyes aforesaid, and my hair, of a soft wavy brown, was long and thick. I wore a dress of grey cloth, which, bought and made in Paris, had an air of trimness and elegance in spite of its simplicity; a plain linen collar fastened by a large silver stud, and tiny linen cuffs at my wrists, completed my costume.

I gave a half sigh as I turned away from the glass. It seemed to me at that moment I would rather have been hopelessly plain or romantically ugly, for the one word which described me exactly was "ordinary." Out of a hundred girls there must be ninety just in my predicament, with just enough good looks to save them from plainness, and just too few to be termed attractive, or even pretty.

"Well, it does not matter," I muttered to myself, though I am bound to confess I sighed heavily the while. "I am quite good looking enough not to frighten customers by my ugliness, and as my life is probably destined to be spent in a succession of schoolrooms, it is, perhaps, just as well I am what I am, for I have heard ladies object to handsome governesses!"

I reached Fairleigh about five. All my aunts were at the station to meet me. I had not seen them for five years. I had spent that time in France, and my eyes had insensibly become used to the taste and fitness of Parisian dress. Never had my aunts' foibles struck me so forcibly. There was Winifred, the ex-beauty, got up like a bird of paradise in all colours of the rainbow, till one's eyes positively ached with looking at her; Grizel, the youngest (she must have been fully fifty-four), still attired as a very young girl, who must not aspire to anything but the simplest, most childlike of array; while Judith, the second sister, whom I liked best, and who always seemed to act as a kind of peacemaker between the other two, was evidently clothed entirely from the reversal of their joint wardrobe. Whatever was "too old" for Grizel, whatever was not "grand enough" for Miss Kirkwood, was accounted quite correct for Judith. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the appearance of my second aunt was almost more ludicrous than that of either of her sisters.

I can see her now, as she advanced first of the three to meet me. Her rusty black silk flounces were evidently hers only, because they had grown too shabby for Aunt Winifred; her hat, with its cheap cock's feather, must have been bought for Aunt Grizel, and declined as "too old," and the jacket, unmistakably too tight, had never been intended for Aunt Judy's ample proportions.

I don't quite know why, but she had always been my favourite of the trio, and as I kissed her warmly I did feel for one moment it was good to be among one's own kindred, and that no friends, however dear, can quite take the place of one's own flesh and blood. "How you've grown!" said Miss Kirkwood, looking at me as though she thought it impertinent of me to be a half-inch taller than herself. "But, bless me, Janet, how strangely you're dressed!"

I might have returned the compliment, but I

did not. I settled a rebellious curl on my forehead, and observed that travelling usually made people look rather untidy.

"I did not mean that," my aunt was kind enough to explain; "but you might be a nun; there's not a scrap of colour about you, except those soft things in your hat. I did think, coming from Paris, you would give us an idea of the fashion."

"Perhaps Janet was too much taken up with her books," suggested Aunt Judith.

"Then she ought not to have been. Of all things I hate a blue-stocking; what good does too much learning do a woman I should like to know! It can't help her to dress her children, or keep her house."

"But if she hasn't any children," I observed, mildly, "and hasn't a house!"

"Then I don't see the use of her being a blue-stocking unless, indeed, she is lost to all sense of decorum at to go out into the world and earn her own living."

I had meant not to hide my designs; I had thought myself ready to throw down the gauntlet at any moment; but, really, Aunt Winifred did put it so disagreeably, what well-conducted girls—and at least I was that—would like to describe herself as "lost to all sense of decorum."

"I'm sure Janet isn't blue!" interposed Aunt Judy, kindly. "She doesn't look it."

"I don't feel it," I interposed, quickly. "And I have come to stay six months with you if you will have me," and then and there I bound myself to remain at Fairleigh until next September, offering my fifty pounds as an equivalent for any expenses I might be to them.

They were very pleased, I could see that at once, but they refused the fifty pounds in toto. I should, they said, mournfully, require all I had, since my capital had been so recklessly expended; they would accept ten shillings a week just to cover the expenses of my board, but nothing more.

Then began a time which even now I can't look back to without a shudder. Mr. Grant had meant well in advising me to pay this visit, but if he had known all I was to suffer, I doubt if he would ever have sent me to Fairleigh. The glories of the Kirkwoods, the gentility of the ladies object to handsome governesses!"

I remodelled the three best bonnets; I was allowed to recover the drawing-room furniture in some chintz which had been lying by for ages. I introduced some inexpensive French dishes which it cost me endless trouble to instruct the one little servant how to make, and then when this was accomplished, it took perhaps a month—I sat down with folded hands, and began to find Rose Cottage was anything but an earthly paradise.

I wrote to Mr. Grant, telling him I could not stay the six months, and he sent me back a calm, sensible letter. It was then May; I could hardly decide on a career under a month. It would take some time to find what I wanted; then in the middle of July London would be empty, and even if I had found pupils—he seemed to take it for granted women's work meant teaching—I should be thrown on the world for two months while my employers went out of town.

No; he emphatically advised me to stay where I was, to think quietly over my future, and to let him know my decision early in August. He thought then that, with his assistance, I might hope to meet with something by October.

All this time my aunts had never inquired what I intended to do when I left them. They had ceased sneering at the idea of a Kirkwood earning her own living, but they did not attempt to solve the problem of how a young woman, with no income and a hearty appetite, was to exist if she did not. They chose to ignore my plans after the first of September, and perhaps, on the whole, I was not sorry.

I took to spending a great deal of time out-of-doors. It was lovely summer weather; and



Fairleigh was in a beautiful neighbourhood. It might be years, I thought, before I was at leisure another May and June, so I might as well enjoy myself while it was practicable, and store up the memories of places and hours spent among the birds and flowers wherewith to cheer the lonely winter evenings I might have to pass in some dull, unhomelike London school-room.

I was not an artist; I never had the least pretensions to be one, but I drew fairly well, and was very fond of sketching, so I used to take paper and pencil with me in those long rambles, and I have many a little picture stowed away now which I made in that long, lonely time when I was, as Mr. Grant expressed it "making up my mind"—only that mind had been made up long before I came to Fairleigh.

"What a pretty picture!"

A young man stood by my side looking at my sketch. I had not heard his step, had not seen him coming, and I started as he spoke. I was not used to young men; though nearly one-and-twenty, I knew nothing of the species.

French schools are very carefully supervised, and since I left France—save for that short stay with Mr. Grant—I had seen no place but Rose Cottage.

I don't know that my three aunts objected to men, I never heard them say so, but as none ever appeared at the Cottage, I gradually began to imagine that they were among the many things with which it was derogatory to a Kirkwood to be acquainted; therefore, when I saw a young man not only stand near me, but actually speaking to me, I was fairly electrified.

He was not much my senior, and had a young almost boyish, face. I liked his expression, it was so frank and open; and then the comical side of our both being there together seemed to strike me all of a sudden, and without in the least intending it I began to laugh.

To my surprise he laughed too. It was quite wonderful how that joint laughter broke down our constraint.

I forgot I had never been introduced to him, and that it was a most improper thing to speak to strangers, and when he began to talk to me I answered him back again without a thought that such conduct was highly unbecoming in an intended instructor of youth.

"I wish you'd tell me why you laughed?" he said, presently.

"I couldn't help it."

"But I hope you didn't think it rude of me to look at your picture? I have watched you so often at church I seem to know you quite well."

It was my turn to stare now.

"I never saw you in church."

"I saw you. You sit with the three Miss Kirkwoods."

"They are my aunts."

"So I have heard."

"Where do you sit?"

"In the big square pew with red curtains, close to the pulpit."

"But that is Lady Tremaine's!"

"I know."

"And she hates society, except clergymen and all sorts of odd, preachers, and—you don't look like a preacher!"

"Heaven forbid!" he said, lightly; then, with rather an earnest look at me, "Do you actually mean, Miss Kirkwood, you don't recognise my unworthy identity?"

"I have not the least idea who you are; but you must be something connected with philanthropy or charity, or Lady Tremaine would never invite you to the Park."

"She did not invite me."

"Then I wonder you came; you can't have much proper pride."

"I flatter myself I have a good deal; but a fellow doesn't wait for an invitation before he goes to his own home."

"Tremaine Park can't be your home."

"How fond you are of contradicting. Now, do you know I always fancied it was? I was born there, and though my mother took me away before I was three years old, and I only came back this spring to celebrate my majority, I always looked on Tremaine Park as home."

The truth broke on me at last.

"Then you are Lord Tremaine!"

"I believe so."

"You might have told me before."

"I thought you knew it."

"How should I?"

"I have the pleasure of your aunts' acquaintance. They all three called on my mother to welcome us back."

"How very kind of them!"

"Wasn't it?"

"Yes, for they don't agree with the Countess at all. They think she is too religious."

"They are quite right. My poor mother is always the slave of some special minister. A very awful one is to the fore just now; in fact, he's so sure I'm going headlong to perdition that he doesn't scruple to tell me so. You know, that kind of thing's hardly polite to a man in his own house!"

"I suppose not."

"Miss Kirkwood, how do you get on with your old ladies?"

"They're not old. Aunt Winifred is in her prime, and Aunt Grizel has only just come out, Lord Tremaine!"

He laughed.

"They must calculate somewhat differently to other people. I thought perhaps you were dull down here."

"I am dreadfully."

"So am I."

"Well, I suppose we both have our remedy, Lord Tremaine."

"What is it?"

"We can go away."

"I don't care to go particularly. I might have stayed in London for the season, but I didn't want to. I am going North with a shooting party in August; but till then I see nothing better than to stay here."

"I am going away in September."

"Where to?"

"I don't know."

"I suppose you will go abroad, or to the sea-side; but I thought the Miss Kirkwoods never left Rose Cottage!"

"They never have since I can remember; it is I who am going away, not they."

"But you can't go all alone, you know!" said Lord Tremaine, opening his big, blue eyes. "It wouldn't do at all."

"Why not?"

"No young lady ever travels about by herself."

"But I'm not a young lady—I mean I shall not be then."

"I wish you'd tell me what you mean."

"You had a coming-of-age this winter, didn't you, Lord Tremaine? I have heard my aunt talk about it—it was a very great ceremony; everyone was feasted and fêted, and there were fireworks, and dancing, and all kinds of amusements, and the meaning of it all was that you were one-and-twenty."

"How funny you put it! It wasn't half bad, you know, really."

"Well, next September I shall be one and twenty; there won't be any feasting or dancing, or amusements, but still I shall come of age just as really as if there were, and from that day forward I shall be free to do what I like with my own life."

"And what shall you like to do?"

"Work."

"Nonsense," and he took my hand quite like an old friend. "One of my mother's pet preachers must have got hold of you and talked to you about your latter end."

"I think not."

"You've no need to work; you're much too pretty. I don't wonder at your wanting to go away from Fairleigh and the old ladies, but you mustn't think of work."

I got up and collected my things.

"It is getting late," I said, succinctly. "I must be going home, or I shan't be in time for tea."

"I'll go with you," said Lord Tremaine, promptly. "Miss Kirkwood likes me; she's sure to give me a cup of tea."

"Don't you think you're very vain?"

"No," and he laughed again. "All old ladies like me; it's a kind of way they've got."

"I thought Aunt Winifred disliked all young men! None ever come to Rose Cottage."

"How long have you been there?"

"A month."

"Ah, Mr. Appleby has been away some weeks. He comes often enough."

"Who is he?"

"A doctor, who is quite sure one of the Miss Kirkwoods would make him happy, and has spent fifteen years in trying to ascertain which one."

"How very stupid!"

"Call things by their right names, Miss Janet, and his caution becomes prudence."

"I shall hate him."

"Your aunts do not. Let me carry that for you; it is too heavy for a lady."

We reached Rose Cottage, and I quite expected a scolding when Aunt Winifred opened the door and saw Lord Tremaine carrying my sketch-book, camp-stool, and portfolio as humbly as though he had been a hired porter.

Never was I more surprised than to see her smile blandly, shake the Earl's hand as soon as it was freed from my possessions, and press him warmly to take a cup of tea.

"It is just brewed, Lord Tremaine. You must be glad of a rest after carrying those things for that naughty child; do come in."

He agreed. Aunt Winifred's manner to me was absolutely carefree. I came to the conclusion I had been quite mistaken, and gentlemen were not forbidden visitors, after all, at Rose Cottage.

When we got into the drawing-room Mr. Appleby was discovered talking to my younger aunt. He was introduced to me with greatunction, and I had much ado not to smile as I remembered the Earl's description of his conduct. I had full proof of its correctness, for never was anything more carefully adjusted than the division of the Doctor's attentions. If he sat between two of the sisters, was he not opposite the third? If he replenished the teapot for Aunt Winifred, did he not cut bread-and-butter gallantly for Judy, and ring the bell for Grizy? I own I felt annoyed with all my relations, they showed him so unmistakably they were each and all resolved to become Mrs. Appleby if he gave them the chance.

I thought it almost disgusting; but then at twenty-one one is a little hard upon elderly love-making. Then, too, as I had told Mr. Grant, I hated any woman marrying for a home; and what but a desire to exchange Rose Cottage and poverty for the Doctor's red-brick house and affluence could have induced the three sisters to pay such devoted attention to the little winzed old man who looked every month of seventy?

Lord Tremaine did not linger long; he begged Aunt Winifred to bring me some day to see his mother, and then he took his leave, and I think the Doctor felt a qualm of fear he might become an engaged man against his will if he lingered alone with his three suitors, for he speedily followed the Earl's example.

"My dear Janet," and Aunt Winifred kissed me quite affectionately; "you are a true Kirkwood after all!"

The other sisters beamed approval. I confess I felt unconscious of what I had done to merit it till my eldest aunt enlightened me thus:

"He came of age in the winter—twenty thousand a year if he has a penny; a nice pleasant young man, perfectly heart-whole, and no relations in the world to interfere; for his mother's so busy with her religion she's no time to think of anything. My dear child! it seems a perfect providence you met with him to-day. I can see he is impressed; if you are only careful and play your cards well you will be Lady Tremaine of Tremaine Park, a position worthy even of a Kirkwood!"

I never felt so ashamed of myself and my relations in the whole course of my life.

"I would rather starve," I cried, "than scheme to marry a man because he is rich; I haven't the least desire to be married. In fact, I think weddngs a great mistake."

The storm blew over then. Lord Tremaine and I met often, and were fast friends. Before I had seen him three times he confided to me a hopeless attachment to a young lady he had met in Ireland. From that moment I felt safe I might have him for a friend, and he, at least, would never suspect me of wishing to be more.

So Lord Tremaine, a wealthy Earl, and I, penniless Janet Kirkwood, took many a walk, spent many an hour pleasantly together in that bright summer; and he told me about his lady-love until I felt almost as if I knew her.

She was staying with an uncle in London till the season was over, and would then be in Yorkshire; and he was going there late in August for the shooting. He had promised his mother not to speak to Mona until he had proved the strength of his love for her by six months' separation, and that was why the open-hearted young nobleman kept in the dulness of his ancestral home. He could not go to London without meeting Mona, and he would not trust himself to see her until he could ask her to be his wife. I liked Lord Tremaine very much. In spite of his rank, in spite of his romantic attachment, there was something so irresistibly youthful about him that, instead of regarding him as one of England's hereditary legislators, I never could help thinking of him except as a mere boy.

Our intimacy was very pleasant, the more so because we both knew our friendship was safe to grow into nothing else. I think those weeks of summer idling were some of the pleasantest I ever spent. We suited each other; he delighted to talk about his Mona, and there was something to me perfectly delightful in listening to the story of a real love affair.

I don't think anyone but my aunts has ever dreamed as to the friendship. Lady Tremaine, I know, has not; she took a great fancy to me, and tried hard to make me enter what she called the "narrow gate."

I don't think she ever succeeded, but she always believed she was on the point of doing so, which made me a welcome visitor at the Park, where, strangely enough, I often, as time passed on, met Mr. Appleby, who was an old acquaintance of the Countess.

"Miss Janet," said Tremaine to me one day, when I had been lunching with his mother, and he was picking me a bunch of hothouse flowers to carry home, "I wonder if you would be offended with me for giving you a word of warning!"

His manner was so grave I began to think something dreadful was coming, and flushed hotly—a way I have when troubled.

"I don't think you would say anything unkind, my lord."

"You know I wouldn't. We have been such chums, but I see a most awkward affliction threatening you, and though I haven't an idea how to set about it I think I ought to warn you!"

I looked at him ruefully.

"Am I growing bald or blind, or anything like that?"

"Oh, dear no!" and he laughed quite merrily; "but really it's very serious. How I wish Mona were here; she'd make you understand by a hint. I am so clumsy—I must tell you in plain English!"

"I prefer plain English."

"That's right! Now—don't be vexed—do you know Appleby's in love with you?"

"What!"

"My dear girl, I put it plainly enough to you—Appleby's in love with you."

"I don't believe it."

"I do. I have expected for days that he had transferred his allegiance from the three Miss Kirkwoods collectively to the fourth Miss Kirkwood individually; but it's past doubting now, for he spoke to my mother."

"To the Countess!"

"Asked her to pave the way for him—to sound her dear young friend, etc. Janet, are you blind? Didn't you understand her ladyship's drift at lunch, when she asked you whether you preferred a town or country life, and whether you liked the society of people older than yourself? I felt quite angry with you, for you made your answers so delightfully vague. I am sure the master

would go and report to her *privilegio* that you were quite prepared to listen to him, and that he might propose as soon as he liked."

"Lord Tremaine!"

"You promised not to be angry."

"It is too absurd!"

"Well, of course the fellow has shown good taste in preferring you to the old ladies, but I confess his presumption is somewhat strong."

"He must be seventy!"

"Probably."

"I shall not listen to him."

"I never thought you would. But, Janet," and the boyish face grew unusually grave and thoughtful, "have you thought at all of the storm which will break over your head?"

"No."

"I believe whichever of the three sisters he selected the other two would have buried their own hopes and accepted him as a brother-in-law."

"Well, they can do so still."

"Do be reasonable! If you refuse him they must know it. They'd be mad enough anyway, but still if you married him they'd gain a good house to visit at; a rich nephew (for he's made a lot of money), besides seeing their niece settled as becomes a Kirkwood. On the whole, though they'd be put out if you accepted him, their wrath would be nothing compared to the fury they'll shower on you if you refuse him."

"Which I shall."

Lord Tremaine smiled.

"Of course."

"It's no business of theirs!"

"I fear they will think it is. Come, Miss Janet, confess it will be a galling position to see the husband they have aspired to for fifteen years discarded by their niece. I fancy Rose Cottage will be too hot to hold you."

"I can go away."

"But where?" persisted the Earl. "My mother is so on Appleby's side she's safe to take your aunts' part. Then that lawyer friend of yours is sure to be out of town—lawyers always are in August—and altogether it seems to me you'll be in a fix."

"Well, I must get out of it."

"Couldn't you stave off Mr. Appleby's proposal till your guardian comes back?"

"I'm afraid not, from what you say. Mr. Grant will not be in town till the first of October. He wrote and asked me if I would postpone making any inquiries for a situation till then, as he had been ill and wanted a change."

"Two months hence. You might do it if you fought shy of Appleby."

"I'll do my best."

"I hate to hear you talk of a situation."

"It will be my best plan. You see I was educated for a governess, and so there's no hardship in being what I was always meant for. I shall like it a hundred times better than such a life as my aunts."

Lord Tremaine's warning had not come a day too soon. That very afternoon Mr. Appleby met me as I was walking home, and before I knew what he was about had laid his heart and hand at my feet.

He was very frank; alluded to the disparity (he ventured to call it a slight one; I know it was fifty years) in our ages, but suggested his riches and my poverty more than balanced that.

He assured me he would settle the red-brick house and all his fortune on me, and that he would be a most indulgent husband. Finally he said he had applied to my Aunt Winifred as my nearest relation and received her consent to his entering the family.

I had the utmost difficulty in making him understand I rejected him. After having been anguished for persistently for fifteen years by three Miss Kirkwoods with money, it must have seemed to him passing strange to be refused by a fourth without that useful appendage. However, I made it clear to him at last—and then I went home.

It is better to draw a veil over the reception which awaited my tidings. I don't think I shall ever forget the misery, the degradation, the loneliness which seemed to assail me. I know I told my aunts I should leave them the next day, and earn my own living.

I think they retorted back they always knew I should disgrace the Kirkwoods, and weren't in the least surprised.

Then they changed their minds about the terms for board and exacted the whole of the fifty pounds I had once offered. Then I went to bed.

Ill-news travels fast. Which of my aunts carried the tale to the Countess I can't tell you; but when my packing was finished the next day, and the old kitchen-clock was striking twelve, a little note was brought me from her, and desired me to send my luggage to the station and go over myself to the Park, as she had something she wished to communicate to me.

I did not relish the interview. Neither of my three aunts appeared to say farewell to me, and I let myself out of the cottage with a very desolate feeling, and a consciousness I was in no humour to stand reprimands from the Countess.

To my surprise I received none. Lady Tremaine assured me I had made a great mistake; but when she had once said that, and delivered, as it were, her verdict, she seemed to busy herself more with the consequences of my ill-doing than the sin itself.

She informed me she had always liked me, and that so far from thinking "work" derogatory she deemed it a duty. Therefore, she was pleased to give me a note of introduction to a rather celebrated institution in London (which is a cross between a charity and a governess agency), where, she assured me, they would board me on very moderate terms, and she would also undertake to speak to my qualifications and respectability should I hear of anything likely to suit me.

Lady Tremaine was too simple-minded to know the extent of her kindness; she lived too retired a life to be aware of the precise value of a titled recommendation; but, all the same, she meant kindly.

Within four-and-twenty hours of my first proposal I was settled in Bartley-street, an inmate of the "Governesses' Home," my claim being that the Countess—a liberal subscriber—had recommended me, and that though not a governess, yet I was hoping soon to be one.

I began very hopefully. I had twenty pounds in my pocket, besides the hundred in Mr. Grant's keeping. I knew that as soon as he was back in town he would interest himself in procuring me a situation, and, with my qualifications, I saw no difficulty in the task.

Alas, for human expectations! I had not been a week in Bartley-street before I heard of my guardian's dangerous illness.

I had written asking to be allowed to see him. His sister wrote in reply. I fancy she must have cherished an instinctive dislike to me, for she said it was quite impossible her brother could answer a business letter for quite three months, and that she hoped I should, therefore, apply to some other friend to advise me.

Three months, and already my twenty pounds were melting!

I made a rash resolve I would examine the "books" of the institution the next day, and apply for every situation whose requirements I possessed.

I remember I wrote twelve letters, and that they were to all parts of England. I had but one reply; it was from a clergyman's wife. She wanted to find a governess for her sister, who resided in South Africa.

The salary was fair—not enormous—the duties apparently light, and a comfortable home was specially mentioned as one of the advantages.

I nearly put the letter in the fire, for I had not the smallest idea of expatriating myself; but on reflection it seemed to me rather a good plan.

In Africa, I thought bitterly, surely I should be far enough off not to disgrace my relations; besides, a very few interviews with intending employers had taught me that, like my aunts, many of them regarded governesses as a separate and distinct class, somewhat below their upper servants.

I had heard lots about "colonial ease."

"colonial freedom," and I had a vague sort of idea that universal equality prevailed, and labour was thought honourable rather than otherwise.

I had not a single tie to my native land, not a single farewell it would pain me to utter, and so it seemed to me I was of all people specially suited to travel thousands of miles to instruct children I had never seen.

In this new mood I called on the lady with whom the selection of the governess rested, and she liked me, or said she did. I found she wanted to make a three years' agreement.

"I could not," I said, simply. "I think I should hate people if I knew, however much they disliked me, I was bound to stay with them three years."

Mrs. Warburton smiled.

"I don't think you will hate my sister. If you left under the three years you would not expect her to pay your journey home! The passage is a very expensive one."

"Oh, no! Besides, I don't think I shall ever come home. I hate England!"

"Don't say that! Then I will write to Lady Tremaine, and let you know her answer."

Lady Tremaine's reply was most satisfactory, and I was engaged forthwith. Mr. Warburton took my passage, and his wife placed ten sovereigns in my hand to pay the expense of my up-country journey. Her sister resided on a farm several miles from Grahamstown; she had no doubt Mr. Fraser would come as far as that town to meet me. She was quite sure I should be very happy.

I did not quite feel so sure. It was wonderful how fond I grew of England now I was to leave it! A week after I had expressed my hatred of my native land I had come to the conclusion it was the dearest place in the world, but I was a great deal too proud to draw back. Besides, what alternative had I? It seemed a choice between Mrs. Fraser's farm and starvation—of course I preferred the first.

Of course I wrote and thanked Lady Tremaine for her kindness, and she sent me back a splendid fur-lined cloak, to wear on the voyage, and a collection of tracts. I have no doubt she thought both very useful, though furs are about the last requisite of an African wardrobe. The Earliest me a small travelling desk with silver fittings, and my monogram in silver on the lock. I have it still, and found it of far more service than either the cloak or tracts.

I think now I must have been half beside myself to set out so suddenly on that voyage. I knew nothing whatever of the Colonies, my whole idea of Africa might have been summed up thus:—"There are black people, and it is hot."

The Frasers might have turned out tyrants; their farm might have been in the wilds of some undiscovered swamp, and I could not have complained. I asked Mrs. Warburton not a single question, except the number of children and their ages. I took all else on trust.

I wondered a little dimly, as I stood on deck and watched the English coast gradually receding from our view, what my three aunts were about, and whether either of them had accepted the reversion of my repentant adorer; then I grew graver still, and wondered whether Mr. Appleby's was the only love that would ever be offered me.

I had not used to think much of such things. I fancy, indeed, I was a trifle hard and unromantic, but ever since I had known Lord Tremaine, and listened to his raptures about Mona, I had somehow changed.

Would anyone ever be as much wrapped up in me as he was in her?

Would anyone ever think the world well lost for my dear sake, and be ready to risk all—the loss of friends, of family, just for love of me?

I thought not.

Of course I was not pretty, and yet it was very hard if only pretty people were loved.

I had come to this point in my musings when I looked once more on the prospect. The last trace of England had disappeared, and we were out at sea. Ah, when and under what circumstances should I again see my native land!

I took with me at least two good gifts—youth

and health. Now my history had all to come, what would it be like? What kind of a creature would Janet Kirkwood look when she returned at last to England?

## CHAPTER II.

Mrs. FRASER'S farm was situated at Wednesday's River, but whether that was the name of the farm, of the village round it, or of the whole district, I had not the faintest idea. Mrs. Warburton herself did not seem clear about the precise geography of her sister's abode. She always directed her letters Mrs. Fraser, Wednesday's River, Red District, and as they always got answered in due course, of course that was right. If I took the train to Grahamstown no doubt Mr. Fraser would meet me there, and if he didn't the officials—she was evidently a lady with great faith in officials—would be able to tell me the best means of going on.

I had a very pleasant voyage. I proved a good sailor; then not having gone through any very painful parting, my spirits were very fair, so that I was quite cheerful enough to be ready to make friends, and I did make one or two very firm ones before we reached Cape Town.

My chief intimate was a lady who lived at this port, and when she heard my destination she declared I had much better come and stay with her for a few days, and then go from Cape Town to Grahamstown without touching at Port Elizabeth at all.

This lady, who was an old inhabitant, and knew African geography far better than poor Mrs. Warburton, declared that there was another station far nearer to Red District than Grahamstown. In fact, she entirely remodelled my whole route, and finally despatched a telegram to Mr. Fraser to tell him the exact time at which I might be expected.

No answer came to her despatch, but this she assured me was quite a matter of course. People were not methodical in Africa, and with them silence meant consent. If the Frasers hadn't been perfectly willing to have me on the day mentioned, and to come as far as Dodderton to meet me, they would have sent word.

I own I felt the least bit uncomfortable. I had been engaged by Mrs. Warburton and she had mapped out my journey. In my dependent position had I a right to alter her arrangements? Would it not make Mrs. Fraser think me at least a little presumptuous?

My new friend, Mrs. Van Ran, laughed heartily.

"You have a perfect right to travel as you please; the Frasers ought to be glad to be spared the trouble. Dodderton was over so much nearer Red District than Grahamstown, and the station having only been opened a few months was, of course, the only reason Mrs. Warburton had not directed me to travel to it. Besides," continued the kind creature, "I knew Colin Fraser well ten years ago, and I assure you he was the best hearted man I ever met. It would be quite impossible for him to take offence at such a natural change of plan."

"Do you know his wife?"

"I had never heard of his marriage. Perhaps he brought out a wife when he came back from England. I know he went home very soon after we lost sight of him."

This fitted in exactly. Mrs. Fraser's eldest children were twin girls of eight. Of course she had been married in England, and then come out to the Colony. Mrs. Van Ran seemed more interesting than ever now she could tell me something of my employers.

"He is awfully nice!" she said, confidently. "You're sure to get on with him; he has a most romantic history. He was heir to some old English family, when his uncle suddenly took it into his head to marry his housekeeper and have a son. Colin had been bred to no profession or business, but he understood farming thoroughly, having been a kind of manager of the estate under his uncle. He had a few hundred, which came to him from his mother, and he got on very well out here. Fancy Colin

Fraser with a wife and family! Somehow, I never looked on him as a marrying man."

I spent a week very happily in Cape Town, then the time arrived for my parting from the Van Rans, and they all escorted me to the station, and saw me into the train. When I saw the carriages with the movable bunks which came out and converted themselves into sleeping berths, I thought I had never heard of anything so funny. Mrs. Van Ran saw me ensconced, in one of the lower ones, which, with a roll of shawls for a pillow, was anything but uncomfortable.

I begged to know if any sleeper mounted to the upper berth whether he would not infallibly come through and fall with a crash on me, but they laughed and told me it was all right, and if I didn't fidget I should sleep as peacefully as in my bed at home.

We started; Mrs. Van Ran had put a black tarleton bag over the lamp, so there was only a subdued light. We moved along at what seemed to me a funereal pace. I think if you divided the miles traversed by the hours occupied in the transit, there would be an average of twelve miles per hour; but then, as we came to a dead stop whenever the engine-driver felt inclined, and varied the monotony of the journey by long waits at the more important stations, this calculation is hardly fair.

I started with the firm resolution to keep wide-awake and never close my eyes. I felt sure I should be carried past Dodderton, or that some one would clamber to the berth over my head and in so doing come down and crush me.

But after an hour of the slowest progress I had ever known I began to get drowsy. It was ages before we were due at Dodderton, and if I did take a little nap it would not last long. There seemed no chance of my solitude being invaded; it was certainly foolhardy to keep awake when I was tired, and then—the last of the argument was lost, for I fell asleep.

How long I slept I have no idea, but I am quite sure when I woke it was the middle of the night. I had a cold, sleepy sensation as I looked round. I wondered where I was, and what had happened; then, as I strove to rise, I knocked my head against the berth over mine, and before I had recovered from the shock, had the supreme horror of seeing a man's foot dangle over the side, and hearing a very sleepy voice inquire,—

"What on earth's the matter?"

"Oh!"

I have said "Oh" many times, in my life before, but I don't think I ever crowded so much surprise and dismay into that much-used monosyllable until that moment.

My "Oh" must have been a little perplexing also to the listener, for in another moment the foot was followed by a leg, and before I knew what was coming a gentleman had leaped to the ground and stood confronting me.

It was the strangest meeting ever known. I was dimly conscious that my face was flushed and my hair ruffled. I was dressed in the soft grey dress in which I had travelled to Fairleigh, but a night's slumber must have rumped it considerably; in short, I was conscious that I appeared at my very worst.

My companion was five or six-and-thirty; he wore a light tweed suit, and though I had evidently disturbed his dreams, looked anything but ill-tempered. He had blue eyes, darker and more thoughtful than Lord Tremaine's, his face was graver too, and had lines about the mouth.

He stared at me in so much amazement that I thought, nervous though I was, I had better begin the conversation.

"I am very sorry if I disturbed you," I said, calmly; "but I woke up in a fright."

"Nightmare, I suppose!"

"I don't think so. I couldn't remember where I was, and then I bumped my head."

"Which bumping had the effect of a small earthquake on my couch?"

"I am very sorry."

"It's not worth being sorry about. Do you know it's daylight? Suppose we do away with all this business, we shall be more comfortable."

Before I knew what he was about the props which supported the two upper berths were re-

moved, and the berths resolved themselves into very comfortable padded backs for the seats. In fact, the carriage now looked just like an English one, except for the absence of the "arms" which generally divide first-class passengers from each other.

I had time now to feel embarrassed. Here was I alone at daybreak with an utter stranger, and, what was more, I was evidently expected to be on friendly terms with him. I came to the conclusion Africa was a very strange place.

"You look tired to death," he observed, presently. "Have you been travelling far? I didn't see you when I came in."

"From Cape Town."

"You are English, though?"

"How did you guess it?"

"I don't know. I have been out here a dozen years, and yet I can always detect a fellow-countrywoman."

"I am English; I only got to Cape Town a week ago."

"And how do you like the Colony?"

I pouted.

"Everyone asks me that."

"It is the correct thing to do; but I will change the form of the question. How long do you mean to stay?"

"I don't know."

"There are a great many young ladies come out as religious helpers in a Sisterhood—'workers,' I think they call them. I took you for one of them."

"Oh, no!"

He looked at me again.

"No, you are not the style, I can see now."

"I beg your pardon, do you mean I look as if I were irreligious?"

"Oh, dear no; but I couldn't fancy you wearing a black poke-bonnet and teaching dirty little children."

"I hope they will be clean."

"Who?"

"The children I have come to teach."

"Then you are a worker after all?"

"Yes; but not in the sense you mean. I have come to be a governess."

He looked at me again.

"I wonder what your friends were thinking about?" he said, at last.

"I haven't got any."

"Nonsense!"

"I haven't got any near enough to care what I do with myself."

"No relations?"

"Three aunts."

"And what do they say?"

"They say I was born to disgrace the family, and I think, on the whole, they'd prefer me to do it in Africa than in England."

"And—you—do you think work a disgrace?"

"No; but a good many people do."

"You don't look fit for much work. Where are you going to?"

"To the Frasers."

He started. I felt quite sure he knew the Frasers, and that in some way or other the idea of their having a governess surprised him, but he only said, quietly,—

"Do you know his Christian name?"

"Colin, I believe."

"And he lives at Wednesday's River Farm, Red District?"

"Yes."

"How very strange!"

"Why?"

"Are you Miss Kirkwood?"

"Yes; how did you come to know my name?"

"About three days ago Mr. Fraser received a telegram from Mr. Van Ran, saying that Miss Kirkwood would be at Dodderton on Tuesday. Mr. Fraser being absent from home, though the message got to the farm three days ago, there was a delay in sending it on, and he only got it last night."

"Then he won't be able to come and meet me," I observed, dejectedly. "Well, never mind; I dare say I can find the way, and I must try and remember I am only a governess, and ought not to expect to be treated as a visitor."

"What nonsense!" said my new friend,

irritably. "A lady is always entitled to consideration; and I'm sure Colin Fraser was awfully sorry about the delay of the telegram."

"You have seen him since, then?"

"Oh, dear, yes! Fraser and I are great chums, Miss Kirkwood—what people call 'inseparable'."

"And I suppose you know his house?"

"As well as I do my own."

"Then, perhaps," for in spite of my assumed courage I was quaking at the prospect of the unknown journey, "you wouldn't mind telling me the best way to get from Dodderton to Wednesday's River."

He looked more troubled than ever. My request seemed simple enough, but evidently it vexed him.

"Never mind," I said, proudly. "No doubt the officials will direct me."

He burst out laughing.

"I beg your pardon; but when you have once seen the solitary man at Dodderton I don't think you will dignify him by so grand a name. The station itself is a kind of wooden horse-box. A man comes up twice a day to collect and issue tickets. He spends about an hour at the place in all, and as for giving you information I don't believe it's in him."

I felt ready to cry just as the train stopped at a station of some importance.

"I am going to bring you some tea," said the stranger, in a much kinder tone. "It won't come up to the liquid you are used to call by that name in England, but it will be better than nothing."

He was soon back with a cup of something that was, at least, warm and sweet, if nothing else, and a plate of bread-and-butter.

"The only other comestibles are mutton-pies and jam-tarts, neither of which looked nice," he said, with a smile.

I had my little purse all ready, but he rushed off before I could inquire the price of my breakfast, and when a dingy boy appeared presently to claim the plate and cup, he informed me "the gentleman had paid," so there was nothing for it but to put my purse back and try to feel grateful.

But gratitude doesn't come by trying. If this giant stranger would have promised to show me the way from Dodderton to the Frasers, I would have been very thankful to him. It could not have been much more trouble than providing me with tea and bread-and-butter. But he had shown me most unmistakably he did not want to be bothered by my company, and so I felt irate, and if I had not been both hungry and thirsty I should have sulked and refused his generosity.

His face was grave when he returned, and he seemed more than ever perplexed.

"We shall be at Dodderton at two o'clock, Miss Kirkwood," he said, after a long silence, in which we had been whirled some distance.

"I am so glad—I feel tired to death of travelling. It will be such a relief to me to reach my destination."

"Have you any relations in Africa?"

"Oh! no; but then I have no relations anywhere who care about me."

"Poor child!"

"I am not a child!"

"What then?"

"A woman!"

He laughed.

"Pardon me, but no one would give you credit for it. When I saw you this evening looking at me with great frightened eyes, you seemed the veriest baby I had ever met."

"Thank you," indignantly.

"Well, I like babies. If there is one thing in human nature I detest it is a strong-minded woman."

"Then you detest me!" I said, shortly.

"You don't mean you ever aspired to the title! Give up your ambition; nothing will ever make you into one of the 'masculine sisterhood.' Why, at this very moment I believe your heart is sinking into your shoes because I have told you there is no 'official' at Dodderton qualified to serve you as guide and escort."

Two tears rolled down my cheeks.

"I don't think it's mainly to reproach me with

my helplessness," I cried, indignantly. "Can I help it if I have never been in Africa before? Can I help it if the people who are going to buy my labour don't think enough of me to help me to get to them?"

"The fault is not Colin Fraser's, I assure you, Miss Kirkwood, no one in the world could be more distressed than he at the thought of your suffering any annoyance."

But I was still crying.

"I thought it would be so nice to be independent, and I meant to work so hard in my situation; and now they don't even care enough about me to send word how I am to get there; and you, who are going near the very place, won't condescend to tell me the way to the farm!"

He got up and walked the whole length of the carriage twice in silence, then he sat down opposite to me and took my hand. I tried to draw it away, but I was powerless to evade that firm grasp. He looked full into my face with his dark blue eyes, and said gently,

"Don't cry, and don't be angry with me. I am going to explain it to you; perhaps it would have been better had I done so at first, but I could not bring myself to do it. Miss Kirkwood, I am Colin Fraser!"

I stared. He evidently seemed to think the disclosure would explain all to me. It did nothing of the sort; I was more mystified than ever. If he were the father of my pupils, and my own employer, what could be simpler than for him to take me to his house!

"Then it will all be easy," I said, still perplexed. "Of course you are going home, and you will show me the way. Is Mrs. Fraser better, and do you think the children will be pleased to see me?"

He looked at me appealingly, almost as though begging me to understand and spare him some painful revelation; then, seeing my bewilderment, he went bravely on,—

"There has been some strange mistake. The moment I had Mrs. Van Ran's telegram I knew there had been an error, but it was impossible for me to set it right. I knew that if I rushed off to Cape Town that very instant you would have left it before I got there. All that was in my power was to come on by this train to Dodderon, and try to find you out and explain things as well as I could."

"You have found me out," I said, sharply; "so perhaps you will kindly explain."

"It is ever so much worse than I expected," said Colin Fraser, simply. "I thought governesses were always big hony women, who could take care of themselves."

"I can take care of myself."

"You—you look a baby—the kind of creature a man would like to shelter and protect from life's rough winds. I don't think I'm a coward, Miss Kirkwood, but I have hated my task ever since you have told me your name."

"If you would only explain," I said, crossly.

"Well, then, I am Colin Fraser, and I have neither wife nor child."

Dead silence. If he had flung a bombshell at me and it had exploded I could not have felt more consternation.

I put one hand to my head, and tried to think. What did it all mean? I had come more than six thousand miles to teach this man's children, and, if I had, I had neither wife nor child.

It seemed to me as if ruin and beggary stood before me. I possessed only the remains of the money given by Mrs. Warburton for my journey, and perhaps ten pounds of my own—not half enough combined to take me back to England, even if anything worth going to had awaited me there.

My meditations were interrupted by Colin Fraser. He put one hand on my shoulder, tenderly as a mother could have done, and said gently,—

"Try to tell me all about it."

"There is nothing to tell."

"There must be," he smiled. "Someone must have told you there is no 'official' at Dodderon and their need of an instructress. Try and think how it all happened."

"Mrs. Warburton wanted a governess for her

sister's children. She paid my passage, and I agreed to come."

"That is better," said Colin, frankly. "I am relieved of an awful fear. I thought it might be some hoax, and you had really been deceived. Now I am sure it is only an innocent mistake, which can soon be set right. This Mrs. Warburton would never have sent you out and paid your passage if a genuine engagement had not awaited you."

"I am sure she would not have deceived me. She was very nice; her husband is a clergyman, they were both as kind to me as ever they could be."

"Come, I begin to feel quite hopeful. Now try and tell me exactly what address they gave you."

I repeated it like a parrot:—

"MRS. FRASER,  
Wednesday's River,  
Red District."

"And did they give you no direction how to get to it?"

"Mrs. Warburton said I was to telegraph from Port Elizabeth to Mr. Fraser, and that he would most likely come as far as Grahamstown to meet me; but when I was staying with Mrs. Van Ran she said she knew Red District very well, and that Dodderton was much nearer than she telegraphed."

"And you are sure it was Colin Fraser's farm you wanted?"

"Mrs. Van Ran said Mr. Fraser's name was Colin, I remember the initial was C, but I don't think I ever heard the name until she mentioned it."

Colin Fraser was laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks. I sat in offended silence, much annoyed at his want of sympathy.

"I can't help it, Miss Kirkwood, I really can't; it's the strangest mistake I ever heard. Red District extends about fifty miles, and except the centre, where there is a small town called Red District, it is sub-divided under various names. The northern part called Wednesday's River is about twelve miles out of Grahamstown; quite forty miles from there is the small town or settlement called from the district, and near that is my homestead, which in memory of an old friend I call 'Wednesday's River Farm.' Mrs. Van Ran jumped to the conclusion you wanted me, whereas you were seeking Charles Fraser of Primrose Farm, Wednesday's River Division, Red District. Now there is nothing in the world to worry over. All we have to do is to go on to Grahamstown instead of getting out at Dodderton."

"You can get out at Dodderton," I replied, sullenly.

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"I don't want to inflict my company on you."

"Don't you think you're rather unkind?"

"No."

"Look here, Miss Kirkwood, I live miles away from my nearest neighbour, and I haven't a lady friend; for miles there isn't even a decent hotel near. Don't you see what an awful fix I was in? Goodness knows if I'd had a mother or sister living with me I would have rejoiced heartily at the mistake which brought you to my farm instead of Fraser's, but as it was—"

I began to forgive him, for it dawned on me that the position had been awkward, so I let myself think.

"You have been very kind, and I'm sorry I was so unreasonable."

"You weren't. Your mistake was most natural under the circumstances."

"It has been a comedy of errors."

"All's well that ends well."

Long pause.

"And you'll let me take you to Fraser's?"

"Won't it be inconvenient?"

"Not a bit."

"Mr. Fraser."

"Well."

"Do you know them?"

"Very well indeed! I only wonder I didn't guess the real people you were seeking before;

but you see you were so sure it was Colin Fraser I was misled."

"Are they nice?"

"I never tasted them."

"Do be serious!"

"It is a shame to tease you. Yes, Miss Kirkwood, I think my namesakes are 'nice' in every sense of the word. Mrs. Fraser is an English gentlewoman and her children are well brought up. They're not rich, but there's no stint."

"And do you think they will like me? I do so hate the idea of moving about. I should like to stay with them for years."

"I think Mrs. Fraser is sure to like you, but I doubt your staying with her for years."

"Why?"

"I would rather not tell you."

"Is the farm haunted?"

"Oh, dear, no!"

"Do you mean I shall not be clever enough?"

"No."

"Hem!"

"You must know the reason as well as I do. With your face you are not likely to be anyone's governess for years."

"You said just now I had a face like a baby."

"So you have."

"You will see I shall stay for years!" I retorted.

"Perhaps by the time I leave you may really be wanting a governess."

"Perhaps!"

We reached Grahamstown in due time. Mr. Fraser collected my possessions, went off to some livery stables, and finally returned with a novel-looking vehicle called a spider, drawn by two stolid horses, and boasting a small coloured boy behind.

Before we started he insisted on my partaking of dinner. I am convinced the hotel people took us for brutes and brutes, and that Mr. Fraser basely neglected to contradict the mistake.

"In three hours you will be safely at your journey's end," he said, gravely. "I wonder if you will ever give a thought to a poor, lonely bachelor, whose humble home you nearly honoured?"

"And who very much dreaded the said house."

He disregarded the remark, and repeated his former question.

"Shall you?"

"Perhaps."

"I wish you would let me ask you one question, Miss Kirkwood."

"It seems to me you ask plenty, without the telling."

"Well, will you answer it?"

His blue eyes were upon me. I could not help giving the promise he desired.

"Yes."

He took my slim fingers in his broad hand, and looking at me earnestly, said,—

"You told me a while ago you had neither friends nor near relations in England. Have you a lover?"

"Yes."

He dropped my hand with a jerk, and his face grew like a thunder-cloud. I felt bound to defend myself.

"You wouldn't like me to tell a falsehood, would you? And I have a lover."

No answer.

"Are you ready?" I half rose.

But he kept his seat.

"A pretty lover!" he growled at last, "to let you come to the other side of the world. He ought to have married you, if he had had to slave like a nigger to keep you."

"Thanks; but that effort wouldn't have been necessary. He had, as he took care to tell me, a red-brick house and a thousand a-year."

A strange light broke on the cross face opposite to mine.

"Do you mean you refused him?"

"I couldn't help it," I said, apologetically. "You see he was turned seventy, and I had grown to look upon him as an uncle, since he had been paying his addresses to my three aunts for fifteen years."

"Was he a Mormon?"

"Oh, no."

"But the three aunts."

"He was deliberating which would suit him best, then unluckily I came to stay with them, and he liked me."

Mr. Fraser was laughing heartily.

"No wonder your aunts let you come to Africa. Little girl, I think you treated them very badly."

"I didn't!"

"You robbed them of a lover."

"I didn't; I left him for them."

"And this is your only lover?"

I grew hot.

"I think that is a very mean question," I said, snappishly. "How many lovers would you expect me to have?"

But he did not answer, so perhaps he had not calculated.

"Turned seventy!" he repeated, with an air of triumph. "Well, I don't think he has much chance."

"He has none. I don't approve of matrimony."

"Why not?"

"I think most women marry for a home or for money, and it is horrid!"

"And how about love?"

No answer.

"Don't you believe in love?"

"Yes," I said, slowly, "but it is very rare, and we can't all expect to have it."

Mr. Fraser seemed to think the conversation had lasted long enough, for he paid the bill, handed me into the spider, took the reins, and drove off at a gallant pace for my employers.

### CHAPTER III.

I DON'T suppose every girl suddenly transplanted to a distant colony, with different manners, customs, and habits to any she has yet known, would have been happy; but from the moment I saw Mrs. Fraser's face I knew Primrose Farm was going to be home to me, and before I had been there a month I was sure I had been right.

The Frasers were simple, kindly people, who, in spite of the hard work by which they had struggled to independence, had retained all the refined and cultivated tastes they had brought with them a dozen years before.

Music, books, and magazines were all to be found in Mrs. Fraser's drawing-room; and if she took a far more active share in household management than she would have done in England, she never for a moment lost the appearance of a gentlewoman.

It was a twelve-mile drive, over a wretched road into Grahamstown, and with six children under nine she could seldom attempt to leave home, so that she had a great lack of feminine companionship; and it was to supply this almost as much as for the children's education that she had sought an English governess, and from the moment of my arrival she treated me more as a sister than anything else.

Before I had been there a month she knew all about Mr. Appleby's proposal, and had laughed with me over the absurd mistake which had caused poor Colin Fraser so much embarrassment.

"To credit him, of all men, with a wife and children! Why, my dear, he will hardly speak to a lady; he is a confirmed woman-hater, and always has been."

"Not always," contradicted her husband. "He was engaged to an English beauty before ever he came out here, but when his uncle was idiot enough to marry and have a son to cut him off from the baronetcy, why, the heartless creature jilted him. He has never looked at a girl since."

"It's a pity," said Mrs. Fraser, thoughtfully.

"He must have made a great deal of money."

"Plenty," agreed her husband. "What with ostriches and diamonds I should say he had made quite a fortune, but he'll never marry in Africa. When he's got as much as he thinks necessary he'll go home to enjoy it; there's not the making of a colonist in him."

He came over for Christmas, I remember, taking us all by surprise and stayed a week,

making himself the most delightful slave to the children, and amusing us all by his merriment.

"You have come out in quite a new character!" said Mrs. Fraser to him one night, when he had been playing with her little girls. "Don't you find it lonely at home sometimes?"

"Very," was the unexpected reply.

"I have often wondered," she said, quietly, "why you don't marry and settle down."

"I fully intend to some day."

"Then you have got over your dislike to women?"

"I shall not marry a woman."

Mrs. Fraser laughed.

"I don't see how you can do otherwise if you marry at all."

"Oh! I might marry a child or a baby. I have a great affection for babies—I have, really!"

Mrs. Fraser looked bewildered; I think she fancied him a little mad. I kept my eyes fixed on the ground, and was angry with myself for blushing in spite of my efforts.

The next day Mr. Colin Fraser took leave of us. My employers were both going into Grahamstown, and I was to remain at home in command of the children. Imagine my surprise when, half-an-hour after Mr. and Mrs. Fraser had started, our late guest returned by the opposite road.

"The horses seemed tired," he said, in explanation, "and I knew I should be welcome another day, Miss Kirkwood."

"If we had only known! A letter came for you, and we sent it away."

"I met the boy and got it; but for that letter I am not very sure I should have come back."

The twins were gardening, the lesser children taking afternoon naps. Colin Fraser and I were alone, and I began to wish we were not, without in the least knowing why.

"You have been here nearly three months."

"Yes."

"And you like it!"

"Yes."

"I wonder if you have forgotten our journey. I often think of it."

So did I, but I was not going to admit as much, so I said gravely—

"Isn't it a pity Mr. and Mrs. Fraser started for Grahamstown! They would have put off going if they had known you were coming back."

"Janet," said Colin, looking at me keenly with his big blue eyes, "you know perfectly well I didn't come back to see them."

I blushed again.

"I think you know everything I want to tell you," he said, with another of those keen glances.

"I'm sure I don't."

"Do you ever hear from Seventy?"

"From whom?"

"Your lover."

"Oh, dear, no; he is most likely my uncle by this time."

"And are you sorry?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Do you still cherish a distaste for matrimony?"

No answer.

"Do you still believe in love?"

"I don't know—for some people."

"I believe in it for some people, too. Janet, don't you think you could learn to love me?"

"Why?"

"Because I have loved you ever since I saw you, and you know it's very mean of you to steal my heart unless you give me yours in return."

"I didn't steal it."

"Anyway, it is yours."

A long silence.

"You said you would never marry a woman. I heard you tell Mrs. Fraser so."

"And I assure you, as I have done before, you are nothing in the world but a big, overgrown baby."

"I wonder you want such a creature."

"But I do want you. Janet, will you come?"

Mr. and Mrs. Fraser were delighted, amazed,

and perplexed in a breath. We were certainly engaged, as they found out before they were well in the drawing-room, since Colin announced the fact with a haste and pride I thought quite uncalled for; but why we couldn't have made up our minds before, why Colin should ride twenty miles away from me, and then turn back and ride another twenty to get back to me puzzled them not a little.

He made it all clear to me the very next day; he had meant to marry me from the moment he saw me (he took my consent for granted in a most provoking manner, I assured him), but he would not propose until he could see his way clear to returning to England. The letter we had sent after him (he did not say even then what was in it) had brought news which changed all his plans—and so he came back.

"Confess you were glad to see me!"

"I won't!"

"Don't you care a little, Janet?"

There was a sadness in his voice that touched me. I put my hand into his and whispered,—

"I cared so much that I began to count the weeks till Easter. You know Mrs. Fraser asked you to come again then."

"I think you love me a little, Janet?"

"I'm afraid I do—but I never meant to."

"You would miss me if I went away to England!"

I crept closer to him, and shivered at the bare idea. He stooped and kissed me.

"I shall never go without you, sweetheart!"

"And you will come here at Easter!"

"I think not."

"Oh!"

"I don't think either you or I shall be here at Easter, Janet."

"But why?"

"I have spoken to Mrs. Fraser and she has written home to ask her sister to send her another governess, not a baby this time, but a middle-aged individual who can be warranted not to steal other people's hearts. Mrs. Fraser has promised me you need not stay until this paragon arrives and so—"

He paused a little, and then he told me he hated long engagements. "Why shouldn't we be married five weeks hence?"

"Colin!"

"What is it, baby?"

"Someone said you loved someone else long ago—are you sure?"

"Sure that I have forgotten her!" he asked, lightly. "No, baby, I am not, but I am certain of one thing—that another little girl near me is dearer to me far more than Mrs. Mortimer ever was or ever could be."

"You are quite sure!"

"Positive."

He had to go back to his farm to make some arrangements, but before he left I had promised that he should have his way, and I would be married in the beginning of July.

"It is dreadfully soon!"

"It is ages!" contradicted Colin, "but as I have really a great deal to do I won't insist on an earlier day."

When he had gone I found out two things—that he had insisted on refunding the money the Frasers had paid for my passage, and that though he had given my friend a most liberal sum to provide for my wedding, he made the peculiar proviso that I should not buy a single article of attire, and I should be married in a white dress I often wore in the summer evenings when we had been together.

Mrs. Fraser was not a little bewildered. She entertained a belief that even in Cape Town there were no shapes comparable to those of Grahamstown. I think, too, she had enjoyed the idea of helping to choose pretty things and was disappointed.

"I don't mind a bit," I replied, magnanimously, "but I wish he would not spend so much on the wedding. I don't like it."

Before Colin came back the news was brought us that his farm had been sold most advantageously, and he was going to leave Red District.

"He must be thinking of settling in Kimberley," said Mrs. Fraser. "I know he had something

to do with diamond mines. I am so sorry! Janet, do you know I had been looking forward to paying you a visit."

"So you must wherever we are," I protested, and when Colin returned I asked him to give the invitation.

He gave it willingly, but with an addition.

"Only, Mrs. Fraser, it must be an English home—not an African—that my wife welcomes you. We sail for Southampton three days after our wedding."

"Colin!" I exclaimed, as soon as I got him alone. "What can you mean?"

"Only that I have a fancy for England, sweetheart; and the farm sold so well there is no reason my Baby should not have a honeymoon on the Continent if she wants it after we get to Europa."

"I don't want it, and I never meant to be such an awful expense to you."

"I know;" and his eye twinkled. "If I had told you we were about ruined, baby, and I should have to take you to a six-roomed house and a little maid-of-all-work I fancy you would contrive to survive it."

"I am sure I should!"

"And not envy your aunts, Mr. Seventy!"

"Colin," I said, with a smothered sob, "you know I should not. I want no one but you!"

Well, we were married, and though I wore the white dress which had been washed a dozen times, and had no bridesmaids but my little pupils, everyone said it was a very pretty wedding.

"Baby," said my husband, when we had left the steamer and were in the London train, "don't you wonder where I am taking you?"

"It is all so strange. I believe I forgot to ask."

"I have a very old friend in Bedford-place, and I promised him we would stay there a day or two. You are sure to like Grant; he is kindness itself."

"Is he a lawyer? Is his name Alexander?"

"Yes, to both questions."

"Then he was my guardian, and the best friend I ever had."

"How very odd!"

I think Mr. Grant's eyes had never opened so wide before as when he saw me on Colin's arm. The kind old man seemed as if he could not believe his senses.

"Why, it's Janet Kirkwood!"

"No;" corrected my husband, with a smile. "Lady Fraser, if you please, sir."

It was quite true. The letter Colin had received the summer day he left Primrose Farm was from Mr. Grant, telling of the death of his cousin, the schoolboy baronet. From that moment Colin had known of his prosperity, but he wanted to surprise me with it.

And surprised I was. Lady Fraser, wife of a baronet, with twenty thousand a-year, a country estate, and a town house, it seemed too wonderful to be true!

"You must write to the old ladies," said Mr. Grant, lightly, "and tell them you've been a credit to the family at last."

"I shall not."

"They'll find it out in time," said my husband, "and if they don't, Janet and I are enough for each other."

I was actually presented at Court by no less a person than the fair young Countess of Tremaine; and when, at her request, Colin and I spent a week that autumn at the Park, the truth burst upon my aunts that their little objectionable niece was Lady Fraser of Fraser Castle, with an income too and a name older than Lord Tremaine's own.

Mr. Appleby had left the neighbourhood. They were the three Miss Kirkwoods still, and likely to remain so; but they held out the olive branch, and Colin induced me to accept it.

"I owe them a debt, sweetheart, if you do not. For my sake, be friends."

"But, Colin, how can you owe them anything?"

He laughed.

"Didn't they drive you out into the world, and cause you to become a governess?"

"Well, in a measure, I suppose they did."

"Well, then, I owe my wife to them, since I should never have met you but for that 'Happy Mistake.'"

[THE END.]

## NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOURS.

—:—

WHEN Mrs. Chatterton, a very pretty young widow, with one little boy, bought a small cottage at B——, and came there to reside, she thought it an earthly paradise; but Satan entered in paradise, and the very first day that little Roland Chatterton went out to play, a great dog jumped the hedge which divided his mother's garden from her neighbour's, and barked and growled most terribly at the small man in petticoats and red stockings who at once flew to his mother with piteous walls and shrieks of terror.

Mrs. Chatterton caressed her child, placed him in safety in the middle of her bed, and rushed out into the garden, armed with a curtain pole, to expel the intruder. He was there still, and had frightened the little servant, in a white cap, who was called Ronald's nursemaid, to such a degree that she had climbed a vine trellis and clung to it half-way up, crying piteously. Meanwhile, a man of portly habit, and so well-dressed that but for his disgusting conduct, Mrs. Chatterton would have considered him a gentleman, stood on the other side of the hedge, laughing.

"All he wants to do is to lick your hand, young woman," this masculine individual was saying. "He's the best-tempered fellow. Come down and be friends with him."

"I can't, sir!" squealed the little maid. "I'm that afraid, I shall die, sir! I had a cousin died of hydrophy, sir! O-o-h! Oh! He's a climbing up after me!"

Mrs. Chatterton, though mortally afraid of the dog herself, was determined not to quail before these insolent intruders. She advanced slowly.

"Call your dog away, sir," she said. "The brute has already nearly frightened my son into convulsions. Now he attacks my servant. No doubt I shall be the next victim. Call him off!"

"Here, Leo!" cried the gentleman.

Leo heard, and obeyed reluctantly.

"Come down, child," said Mrs. Chatterton. "It is most shocking that we should have this to bear. Is that your dog, sir?"

"That is my dearest friend, Leo," replied the portly gentleman; "and allow me to tell you, madam, that he is worth any ten men and all the women I have ever had the misfortune to meet. The young person is quite safe. Why doesn't she come down?"

Mrs. Chatterton, conscious that the dignity of the situation was not increased by the great exhibition of stocking which Sophy was making, repeated her commands. The maid descended and rushed into the house, uttering a wild shriek; and Mrs. Chatterton turned to the dog's master.

"Sir," she said, "as I cannot permit my only son's life to be perpetually in danger, I must request you never to allow that dog to enter my garden again."

"I'll request him not to do so," replied the gentleman. "He's partial to a bit of fun, though. He's like me in that. It is his sense of the ridiculous, I am sure, that brings him here. If you will climb trees when he appears, he may think it too good a joke to lose. He may insist on coming."

"A dog who would behave like that would prove himself mad," replied Mrs. Chatterton. "I am quite as averse to hydrophobia as Sophy is. I shall think it my duty to shoot him if he trespasses on my grounds again."

Mrs. Chatterton did not own a pistol, and could not have fired one if she had, but the threat enraged the stout gentleman.

"Perhaps you would like to shoot me also," he said. "Observe, madam, I am on my own grounds, not on yours. I have my own opinion of any one who can take a dislike to a noble

animal like that, who can repulse his offers of affection. I begin to doubt the creature's sagacity. Generally he makes no mistakes. Why he should make advances to a cowardly little milk-eop of a boy, and a drivelling idiot of a maid-servant I am sure I can't guess. Come, Leo. Madam, I advise you to take your family to Dr. Pasteur as soon as possible. Good-morning."

"The insolent wretch!" gasped Mrs. Chatterton.

"Oh! aint he, mum?" gasped Sophy, at the door.

"I'd a mind to souse him with boiling water!" called cook, from the kitchen window. "Oh! but he's the devil, that's what he is—bad luck to him!"

The individual thus described was not yet too far away to overhear, and he grinned sardonically.

People said of Mr. Sutphen that he had been jilted in his youth, and had hated women ever since. Certainly they were right about the women. He could see no good in any of them, and when they offended him he behaved most horribly, as in this present instance.

And this was a nice beginning for two neighbours; especially for Mrs. Chatterton, who had never before been treated with any discourtesy, and who was used to look upon men as her natural protectors and admirers. It gave her a new sensation, and a most unpleasant one, to be addressed in that fashion, to be looked at as Mr. Sutphen had looked at her.

Then he had called her son, her baby yet in petticoats, cowardly milk-sop! Considering the exhibition of stockings she did not feel much sympathy for Sophy; still he had behaved like a brute to the girl.

She longed to punish him, and she could not see her way to it. However, she had a gate opened into the other road, that she might not always be obliged to pass his windows in going out.

From this time the widow and the bachelor lived in a state of warfare only possible to country neighbours. There was always a cow or a chicken, a goose or a turkey to quarrel over.

The bachelor had his washing and ironing done at home by his servant, who tied his clothes-line to the branch of an old tree which grew on Mrs. Chatterton's side of the dividing hedge.

Mrs. Chatterton waited until all the shirts and stockings were hung up, and then bade Sophy untie the rope.

Sophy cut it, and all the garments lay upon the ground. Mr. Sutphen consulted a lawyer, and Mrs. Chatterton had a bill for "clothes line, and damage to garments" presented to her, which she paid.

It was only one of a thousand annoyances, and this went on for a full year at least; everybody in the village knew about it, and everybody blamed the old bachelor; but, curiously enough, a great attachment sprang up between the original cause of the quarrel—the great Newfoundland dog, Prince Leo, and the widow's little boy, Roland, who had now got into knickerbockers, and had his long curls cut.

The heads of the opposing armies should have interfered, but they did not. They pretended not to know anything about it.

There was a deep pond, almost a lake, hard by the little cluster of cottages of which Mrs. Chatterton's was one, and Roland had been forbidden to go near it alone. Alas! when his hair was cropped and his skirts put away the baby vanished for ever. Roly became a boy. And he not only went to the lake alone, but went there to paddle about in the water. One day he was missed.

Sophy had lingered at her glass awhile in view of the arrival of the young butcher. A great terror seized upon the mother. She flew towards the pond.

As he saw her coming, naughty Roland ran further into the water and lost his footing. He was drowning—drowning before her eyes. She could not swim, but rushed in after him, shrieking loudly.

Instantly a man rushed across the sand. A dog passed him, and flew into the water.

Mr. Sutphen was the man, Prince Leo the dog. The former brought out the lady, the latter the little boy.

But for their promptitude both would have been drowned, and as soon as Mrs. Chatterton felt sure they were not, she knelt down at Leo's side and kissed him on his good, brown nose.

"You dear thing, I love you," said she, "and you, sir, my eternal gratitude is yours."

After this peace reigned between the cottagers. Offerings of roses from the gentleman, and of custards from the lady, brought on calls and tea-drinking—of course, at Mrs. Chatterton's house. And one day, while they sat opposite each other, with Roly between them, and Prince Leo at his master's feet, Mr. Sutphen remarked,—

"This is very nice. I should like it to be so always."

Mrs. Chatterton blushed.

"Should you?" he asked. "I'll be very good to Roland. I love him dearly."

"And I'll be very good to Prince Leo," she said, "and—and to you."

So it was settled.

## HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

—:—

### CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Nella recovered consciousness she found herself seated in a curious kind of summer-house, with a decanter, some wine-glasses, and biscuits in a tray on a small table in front of her, and Godfrey Somerville, of all people in the world, looking down at her with an expression of real anxiety on his face.

"Mr. Somerville!" she exclaimed, in surprise, "whatever brought you here?"

"Miss Maynard!" he retorted, with a sarcastic smile, "whatever brought you?"

"I—I came involuntarily. In fact, I don't know where I am!"

"And I by necessity," his voice sinking into sudden sadness.

"But where am I?" curiosity prevailing over every other feeling.

"Where you are never likely to come again."

"That doesn't tell me much."

"It is all the answer you will get. I never asked you to come, Heaven knows. It is you who have forced yourself upon me."

"If I did, the fault is Limerick's—not mine; and if the horse is still alive, I will go away as soon as I can."

"You are the bravest girl I ever knew," he said, admiringly. "Would you really have the nerve to ride him home?"

"I must, there is no other way," with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"Well," with a despairing look at the drenching rain, "you must wait till this storm is over."

"Do you know that Miss Somerville has gone to meet you at Copplestone?"

"I guessed she would. In fact, I was starting for the train when I met you."

"But you would never have got there in time!" looking at him, wondering, for his cheeks were ashy pale, and there were dark shadows round his eyes.

"I don't suppose I should; but she would have waited with the patience of a feminine Job. Have some wine," taking up the decanter and pouring out some sherry; "you really must, or you will never get home."

Seeing the wisdom of this argument she put the glass to her lips.

"I suppose there is a house close at hand; perhaps you will let me go into it and put up my hair?"

"Don't put it up, it is beautiful!"

"But I couldn't ride up to the Hall with it, over my shoulders!"

"Why not? A capital excuse for showing it off."

"Thanks; instead of showing off, I should be quite ashamed."

"Just like a woman, to be ashamed of a trifle, and not mind what really matters." He sat

down in a chair, and leant his arms upon the table. "You came here against your will and against mine, but do you think the world would believe it, if it saw you and me together in this cosy little nook?"

If he wanted to frighten her away his speech answered the purpose, for, flushing crimson, she started to her feet.

"Fetch my horse and let me go!"

"Poor Limerick must have a feed of corn and a good rest first. You have no compassion on him, or on yourself."

"As much as you have," her eyes flashing resentfully. "You use the best means you can to drive me away."

"I'm not particularly flush of cash," he said slowly, "but I would have given a thousand pounds, if I could have raised it, to keep you away. Now that you have come, I must ask you to stay, as I do not want either your life or Limerick's to be on my shoulders."

"Then go, and leave me alone."

"When I go, I go with you; but not in this drenching rain. I am thinking what story we can concoct to give a plausible explanation of our meeting."

"Why not tell the truth? that is the simplest plan."

"Because the truth, though simple, is highly inconvenient. You have forced yourself upon my confidence, and now you must respect it. Stay! I think I have it. I came down from town by an earlier train than the 3.40, so got out at Newington, intending to walk to Alverley in time to meet Miss Somerville. On the way I met you, stopped your horse, and brought you to the inn at the cross roads. The storm will account for any delay; and as I intend to send there for some vehicle in which to drive you home, that will confirm my story. Limerick must remain here for the night, and a boy shall bring him home in the morning."

"I never told a lie in my life!" said Nella, proudly.

"No more would I, if I could help it; but when your very existence depends upon it, it is time to begin. Leave it all to me. You would be sure to make a mess of it if you tried."

"Don't be afraid, I was not going to."

"Are you going to put up your hair?" touching it caressingly with his hand. "Perhaps I could help you. I have often acted lady's-maid in the course of my life!"

She drew back with a shiver of disgust.

"Have you ever been married?"

"No, but I had a sister!"

His voice was so unutterably sad that she hurriedly changed the subject.

"Have you been here all day, or did you really go to town?"

"What I have been doing cannot possibly interest you, so why should you ask?"

"Simply because it was so very odd to find you here."

"You know nothing about the place; it may be a model farm, or a training place for someone's racing stud."

"Then why should you object to being found here?"

"Am I bound to explain my reasons to you? You have never honoured me with your friendship, so why should I take you into my confidence?"

"There is no reason, so pray don't," the colour rising in her cheeks as she tried to coil her hair into a knot. "We have been enemies from the first, and, from what I see, are likely to remain so."

His only answer was to catch up the luxuriant masses of bright gold and kiss them passionately.

"Mr. Somerville!" her eyes opened wide in indignant surprise.

"I couldn't help it. You flung them just in front of me, so I was tempted."

"I wish I had a pair of scissors to cut it all off!"

"Here is a knife," drawing one from his pocket.

"Cut it off, and give it to me."

She twisted her hair round hastily out of reach, and replaced her hat.

"Why did you do it?" she said, reproachfully.

"It could have been only out of spite—because you hate me!"

"Do I hate you?" he said, dreamily. "I wish to heavens I did!"

Then he disappeared quickly into the rain, and left her alone.

Soon afterwards a stable-boy passed, mounted on a small pony. The minutes went slowly by; the rain ceased, but the thunder still muttered in the distance, and the sky was hung with heavy clouds.

A feeling of awe crept over Nella in the utter stillness; not a sound was to be heard but the dripping of the leaves or the grumbling of the thunder, and she felt a longing for the sight of some living creature like herself.

Catching up the skirt of her habit, impelled by urgent curiosity, she stepped out of the quaint, pagoda-like summer-house on to the gravel path, walking along on tiptoe and holding her breath, as if she were on the threshold of Bluebeard's palace.

She reached a lawn, at the end of which, with gloomy cypresses for a background, stood an old grey tower. It looked as if it had been built centuries ago by some Norman baron, for the castellated stonework which bordered the flat roof was broken away, and the interstices filled up with massive tufts of ivy.

The windows were closely barred, the solid door, dimly seen under its arched portal, studded with nails. The house was so completely buried in the dark foliage of the oaks that you might pass it by within a few hundred yards and not have a suspicion of its existence. Its aspect was so forbidding in its sombre isolation that the girl, looking at it in awe-struck curiosity, shivered as if a cold wind blew down her spine.

"Curiosity was always a woman's bane," said Somerville's voice close to her ear. "If I had wished you to come here I should have brought you."

"I beg your pardon," she stammered, feeling like a child who had been caught eaves-dropping. "I was so lonely, and so tired of waiting."

"A poor excuse for an act of folly!" he said, sternly, a strange agitation working in his face.

"Do you know that I have more than half a mind to show you the interior of the house you are so anxious to look at, and to keep you there—my prisoner—as long as I like to have you?"

"You could not do it!" she cried, stepping back in alarm.

"Nothing could be easier. Once there, you might scream, and none could hear you; you might die"—his voice sinking—"and none would guess it!"

She looked up into his face in wild terror. It was very pale, but his eyes glowed like living coals. There was a breathless pause. Then the sound of wheels came up the gravel-drive, and his expression changed. Laying his hand upon her shoulder, he said, slowly,

"Don't be frightened, I'll take you home. You owe me something for this; but, woman-like, you will never pay."

### CHAPTER VIII.

An old-fashioned looking dog-cart, drawn by an ungainly bay mare, appeared in the carriage-drive from under the deep shadow of the trees. At a sign from Somerville the stable-boy who was driving it pulled up, and waited at a little distance.

Nella looked at it with eager eyes, as a shipwrecked sailor might stare with renewed hope at the first glimpse of a sail in the distance. She took a few steps towards it; but Somerville, who seemed bent upon thwarting every inclination, placed himself in front of her.

"You are anxious enough to be off; but what security have you that, when once in the dog-cart, I shan't take you in quite a different direction to the Hall?"

"Your own promise," trying to speak calmly.

"And what is more, your own convenience."

"I might take you home eventually; and so keep to the letter of my word—as to my con-

venience, if I consulted that, the best thing would be to put you out of the world altogether."

"If you murdered me," her lips turning white with terror, "I am not so utterly friendless but that someone would be found to avenge my death!"

"Murder is vulgar, I never thought of that; but there are other ways of doing it which are less sensational, but quite as effective. Did you ever hear of secret marriages, when girls disappear from their heart-broken friends as completely as if they had dropped through a trap-door at a pantomime, and come back as blooming matrons after ten years or so of hidden bliss, to find that the world has got on very well without them?"

"Yes, but they were always heiresses—never paupers."

"You have gold enough in your hair to atone for some want of it in your pocket," with an insolent smile. "It is only a girl with a face like yours who can afford to be poor."

"To talk of affording to be poor is ridiculous," doing her best to seem at her ease; "those who are poor long to be rich—and the rich, like yourself, want to be richer still."

"How do you know that I want to be rich?" looking at her sharply.

"I know it by your actions."

"How?"

"I should only offend you if I told you," walking towards the dog-cart.

"You have done that already; there is nothing conditional about it. Are you afraid to answer me?"

"Not in the least," throwing back her head contemptuously. "I know it by the efforts you make to fall in love with Meta Somerville, in order to gain her inheritance."

"You are nothing but a foolish, sentimental schoolgirl!" he exclaimed, with a forced laugh.

"I am not a schoolgirl, and I never was."

Then you ought to have been. I think the atmosphere of a suburban academy would have suited you very well. A man cannot kiss his cousin without being woven into a detestable romance. Come, get in. You have been here a great deal too long already."

"Not through any fault of mine," as she climbed into the cart with the greatest alacrity.

He took the reins in his hand and placed himself behind her, the stable-boy left his post at the mare's head, and to Nella's unspeakable relief, they started. As the drive was too narrow for a turn, they were obliged to make the circuit of the piece of lawn, which brought them in close proximity to the weird-looking tower. Nella gave one upward glance and shuddered.

Suddenly a voice, which seemed to come from just overhead, cried, "Godfrey! Godfrey!" in accents of the wildest exultancy, and a window, which had been opened, was shut down with a violent clang.

Somerville muttered an oath, and lashing the mare recklessly, started her off at a mad pace down the avenue. The dog-cart swayed from side to side, and Nella was too much occupied with a struggle to prevent herself being thrown out to give another glance at the mysterious house; but the cry in its pathetic intensity curdled the blood in her veins, and seemed still to ring in her ears, as they tore along the road at a dangerous rate.

When they were miles away from the shade of the gloomy ilexes, Godfrey spoke for the first time.

"Did you hear my parrot? I brought the bird from the West Indies, and she is the only thing on earth that is devoted to me."

"I heard someone call out your name."

"You say 'someone,' just as if it were a human being, and I'm not surprised. Many people have taken it for a woman's voice."

"And is there no woman in the tower?"

"Yes, a servant—a sort of female Hercules. She could knock you down, and carry you under one arm with me under the other. I never saw such a woman in my life."

"She ought to be a keeper in a mad-house. Her strength must be wasted there."

He gave her one of his covert glances through his black lashes before answering.

"Wasted on a parrot! What a pity she has not you in her charge as well!"

Again Nella felt a creepy feeling all down her backbone.

"It would be a mad-house soon if I were in it. The place gave me the horrors."

"Then don't come near it again. Nobody wanted you."

"I need not tell you, for the twentieth time, that I came against my will!" drawing herself up proudly.

"You need not; it is quite unnecessary," with a scornful little laugh. "If you ran after me or I after you the world would come to an end. Mutual hatred is too convenient a thing to be given up."

"Don't be afraid. I promise to stick to it."

"And so you will, unless I try to prevent it."

"And even then."

"Not then," he said, coolly, "but it is against the probabilities that I should ever try."

"Mr. Somerville," she exclaimed indignantly, "is it like a gentleman to insult me when I am at your mercy?"

"Don't know, and don't care."

"I don't suppose that you remember that you are one."

"Sometimes," moodily flicking his whip, "I forgot that I am, or wish I weren't. I should like to have been born a Red Indian, without the prejudices or the handicaps of civilization. Here we are at the cross-roads. If I were a gentleman like Cyril Vere, for instance, who always talks prettily to a woman, I should take you home, and vow I trusted to your honour; but being Godfrey Somerville, who never trusted a friend without having to pay up, or a woman without repenting it, I say, swear that you will never betray by word, look, or innuendo that you met me anywhere but in the road between Copplestone and Newington on my way to the Hall, or, by Heaven, I swear that I will drive you down that road!"—pointing with his whip to the one which led to Copplestone—"Instead of this" (the road to the Hall); "and all the Cyril Veres on earth should not bring you back until it was too late to wish to come!"

"But I can't tell a story!" looking up at him with imploring eyes.

"Then, my wilful beauty, to Copplestone we go!" turning the mare's head in that direction.

She caught hold of the reins, an act of folly which made the mare rear, and nearly upset them both into the hedge.

"Confound you, can't you sit still?" cried Somerville, savagely.

"No, I mean to jump out," her eyes flashing, her chest heaving.

With a swift movement of his legs, he secured the edge of her habit under his heels.

"If you do, you will hang head downwards, and die of apoplexy in three minutes."

"I would rather that," her lips quivering, "than go, goodness knows where, with you."

"Mach obliged; I don't want the bother of an inquest," in his most brutal manner.

"Say you won't peach and I'll drive you home in less than no time. I don't want to be humbugging about here all the evening without my dinner."

"I'll let you say anything you like, and I won't contradict you."

"That would be a novelty," with a sneer, "but directly my back was turned you would out with it all. My poor parrot would be turned into a screeching woman, and my innocent house into a den of horrors!"

"No; I promise you that I will never say one word about them."

"Honour bright? Swear it," leaning over her, with a piercing glance.

She returned it frankly, although to see his dark face but a few inches from her own made her shiver with disgust.

"I swear it."

"Even Vere, your undevoted spoon, shall never drag it out of you!"

"Never!" her pale cheeks flushing at the mention of that name.

"Then right-about-face," turning the dogcart

round at the sharpest angle. "We shall be home, now, before they have carried off the last entrée."

Under any other circumstances the drive would have been exceedingly enjoyable. It was a lovely evening.

Godfrey Somerville never spoke a word as he drove moodily towards the house, which seemed more like a home to him than any other spot on earth. And Eleanor Maynard was silent, only too thankful to be left in peace, whilst the mare trotted briskly down the broad road which led to safety, and the warm welcome of sympathetic friends.

As they turned into the park-gates, he said, with a cynical smile.—

"If I saved your life a hundred times I don't suppose you would show me a spark of gratitude. You are one of those women whom a man might serve and serve again, and yet each time only get a kick for his pains."

"You are mistaken. If a friend did me a real service, I should take great care to pay him."

"Isn't it a real service to stop your horse and bring you home?"

"Yes; but you were very glad to do so, because I was in your way."

"True, but the service was the same."

"Oh, dear no!" with a decided shake of the head. "Anyhow, I promise to pay you."

"Now, at once!" and he leaned forward, his eyes glowing a slight flush rising on his pale cheeks.

"Pshaw!" she said, contemptuously, as she blushed, and drew away from him as far as she could. "I pay you sufficiently by my silence."

"No doubt it will be an effort to you, for a woman's tongue loves to blab. Here we are, and see what it is to be wanted—half-a-dozen footmen to open the door, and the richest girl in Lancashire ready to jump into my arms!"

## CHAPTER X.

"Oh, Godfrey! Is it you?" and Meta Somerville held out both her little hands in ecstatic welcome, "and dear Nella, who I thought was dead. I have been so utterly miserable about you. But where's Limerick?"

Nella looked coldly at Mr. Somerville.

"Limerick is in very comfortable quarters, where he will spend the night," stopping to take off his dust-coat, after the first greetings were over. "The people of the Red Ploughshare will send him home to-morrow morning."

"But how did he get there?" opening her eyes in amazement.

"Ask Miss Maynard, or rather, don't ask her anything till we've had some dinner. How d'ye do, uncle? Had you given me up?"

"Very nearly," said Sir Edward, with a smile, "we never know when to count on you. But it was Miss Maynard who put us into such a fright, that two of the grooms were started off about an hour ago in search of her."

"I am so sorry, but Limerick ran away with me," she began, timidly.

"Never mind, my dear, so long as you are unharmed," and the Baronet put his hand kindly on her shoulder. "I suppose the poor horse is done for!"

"Not a bit; Mr. Somerville, you said there was nothing the matter with him!"

"But where have you left him? Not in the high road, I hope."

"At the Red Ploughshare," said Godfrey, promptly. "I knew he would be well taken care of, and they have promised to send him home in the morning."

"Hadn't I better send for him at once?"

"Oh, dear no!" hastily, "he will be all the better for night's rest after that frantic ride. Imagine my surprise when I was strolling leisurely along the high road—"

"But how were you on the high road?" asked Meta, curiously. "You told us to meet you at—"

"Because I came down by an earlier train. I knew I should get there too soon for you, so I thought I would get out at Newington and walk the rest of the way. A lucky thing that I did, for Limerick was going along at racing speed, and

Miss Maynard only clinging on, I believe, by the half of his mane. I made a dart at him and stopped him."

"How brave of you!" ejaculated Meta, her eyes shining with admiration.

"I will just run upstairs, and make myself respectable," said Nella, hurriedly, feeling that she could not stand by to countenance the string of falsehoods which Somerville was sure to tell.

"Then so will I," he said, instantly, "I am far too familiar to talk."

"We have some friends with us to-night," said Sir Edward, "but you two shall dine at a side-table."

"And I will act audience," said Meta.

Colonel Fairfax sat at Lady Somerville's right hand. He was a soldierly-looking man, with a sunburnt face and grizzly moustaches.

His wife was fair and commonplace, just good-looking enough not to disgrace the jewels which adorned her ample neck.

After a few eager inquiries from Lady Somerville the conversation went on in an even flow, till, after a hasty toilette, the two late arrivals came in and took their places at the side-table, and were subjected to a cross-fire of questions.

"My dear child, I am so thankful to see you!" said the hostess, fervently, as she held out her hand to Nella as she passed, and drew her down to be kissed. "I have not known a moment's peace since they came back without you."

Nella was pleased, but felt as if she could scarcely speak, she was so utterly tired out.

After drinking a glass of wine she revived, and was able to eat a little dinner; though what she longed to do was to go to bed, but had not the courage to say so.

"Well, Godfrey!" called out Sir Edward from the bottom of the table, when he thought he had left a decent interval for the satisfying of his nephew's appetite; "you stopped the horse, and what happened next?"

"Well, the first thing that happened," emptying his glass of champagne at a draught, "was that Miss Maynard fell into my arms, and I was nearly choked by her hair, which came down with a run."

"A very enviable predicament," and Sir Edward smiled, whilst Nella's cheeks burned, and Meta fidgeted on her chair.

"Charming at any other time or place," with a malicious glance at the girl who hated him; "but I confess I had my hands full. Remember, I had Limerick to manage as well."

"But you forgot the horse," said Colonel Fairfax, over his shoulder.

"Not I. Women are delightful creatures, but horses beat them into fits."

"Godfrey! Godfrey! how can you be so ungentlemanly!"

"Well, uncle, I tell the truth."

"When it suits you," said Nella, in a low voice.

"I'll pay you for that," he returned in a whisper; then added, aloud: "Whatever my feelings, I gave Miss Maynard the preference; for I only tied up Limerick at a gate till further notice, whilst I fetched her water from the ditch, twisted up her hair in an artistic coil with hardly a hairpin to do it with, carried her in my arms to the inn, watched her like a baby through a prolonged attack of hysterics, and, finally, brought her home as soon as we could get a trap to convey us."

"Miss Maynard, is all this truth or nonsense?" asked Meta, rather sharply.

"I can vouch for Mr. Somerville stopping my horse, and bringing me home."

"And you can't contradict the rest!" fixing his eyes upon her, as if to remind her of her oath.

"No; but I was insensible you see, for a few minutes," she said, faintly, feeling she would have given anything to have the strength of a man and knock him down.

"Upon my word, Godfrey, you are a lucky man!" exclaimed his uncle with twinkling eyes.

"When I was a young fellow I should not have minded spending an afternoon with a young lady under such romantic circumstances. No doubt the people at the Red Ploughshare took you for a runaway couple!"



"CURIOSITY WAS ALWAYS A WOMAN'S BANE!" RAID SOMERVILLE'S VOICE CLOSE TO HER EAR.

"That's the nuisance of a thing that happens in the country. I dare say in a few days the accident will be magnified into an elopement; but those who know the truth must make it their business to contradict it."

"That we shall," said Meta, cordially. Then turning to Nella, who was playing with some ice-cream on her plate, she observed in a low voice, "Whilst we were out to-day your friend Mr. Cyril Vere called, and left a card."

"Called here?" her eyes brightening, her lips quivering at the mere sound of the familiar name.

"Yes; Somers asked him to come in and wait, but he said that he had no time to lose, as he was leaving the neighbourhood before the end of the day."

"He will come again?" eagerly, as if everything depended on the answer.

"Not if he leaves the Arkwrights this evening; but, of course, before long he will be coming to see them again," she added, comfortingly. "Godfrey says he knows them so well."

"Uncommonly well, I should say," with a sarcastic smile.

But the words and the smile were alike lost on Nella Maynard. "He came—and I never saw him!" she could think of nothing else.

When the long dinner was over, Meta kindly suggested that she should go and lie down on the sofa in the boudoir, and not come into the drawing-room till it was time for tea. To this Nella willingly assented. She was utterly tired out, both in body and mind, and wanted to get away from everybody and be at peace.

As she crossed the hall she met the butler, and could not refrain from questioning him about the gentleman who had called that afternoon.

"Didn't you tell him that I should be back directly?"

"I did, miss; and, what is more, I told him where you were coming from. He made no doubt he should meet you on the road before he turned off by the Red Plough-harbor."

"Did he go past the inn?" a sudden fear

crossing her mind lest he might have seen her in the dog-cart with Godfrey Somerville.

"Yes, miss, a long way past that to Mr. Arkwright's place, Deepden Chase. There's a very gloomy bit of road that way, which people don't like on the dark winter afternoons. The shortest cut is by a lonesome tower, which they do say is haunted."

"Not a tower buried in dark trees that are almost black!"

"The very place, miss."

"Why, you can't have seen it, for I never have," said Meta, quickly.

"I—I—think somebody mentioned it," suddenly growing crimson.

"Who could? Not Godfrey!" as she led the way into the boudoir, and pushed the sofa close to the open window, that not a breath of air might be lost.

"Mr. Somerville? I never talk to him unless I can help it," and Nella, with a weary sigh, threw herself down on the couch.

"You had plenty of opportunity this afternoon. Come, you must own that you like him, when he has saved your life," arranging the pillow more comfortably as she spoke.

"I never hated any man one-half so much."

There was an unmistakable accent of sincerity about the sentence which made Meta laugh, and her heart bound with a sense of relief. Ever since their arrival together she had been distrusted by the pangs of jealousy, but if further intercourse only increased their mutual dislike it was all right, and she had no cause for fear.

After providing Nella with a bottle of eau-de-cologne she went softly out of the room, hoping that the tired girl would have a comfortable nap. But sleep was rendered impossible by the acute regret Nella felt at missing her cousin, for it is hard to fall into a doze when you have a pain in your mind.

If she had only stopped at home that afternoon, or if she had but met him in the road, at least she would have known by this time whether

there was any truth in the report that linked his name with the lovely heiress!

But it was no use to lie there and make herself miserable about what could not be helped. He had gone away, but she might write to him and tell him how sorry she was to miss him, and hint that that would be by no means unpleasant to hear that there was a chance of his coming to the neighbourhood again.

This thought comforted her a little, and she closed her eyes with an approach to a smile hovering round her lips. Half-an-hour or more had passed away in melancholy cogitation. The gentlemen had come out of the dining-room, and were smoking their cigars in the garden.

The drawing-room door opened and shut, footmen passed up and down the hall, as if carrying in the paraphernalia for tea.

Suddenly a step came close to the window, the smoke of a cigarette floated over her head, and a pale face stooped over her.

"I can trust you!" said Godfrey Somerville, significantly.

"You can," firmly and distinctly.

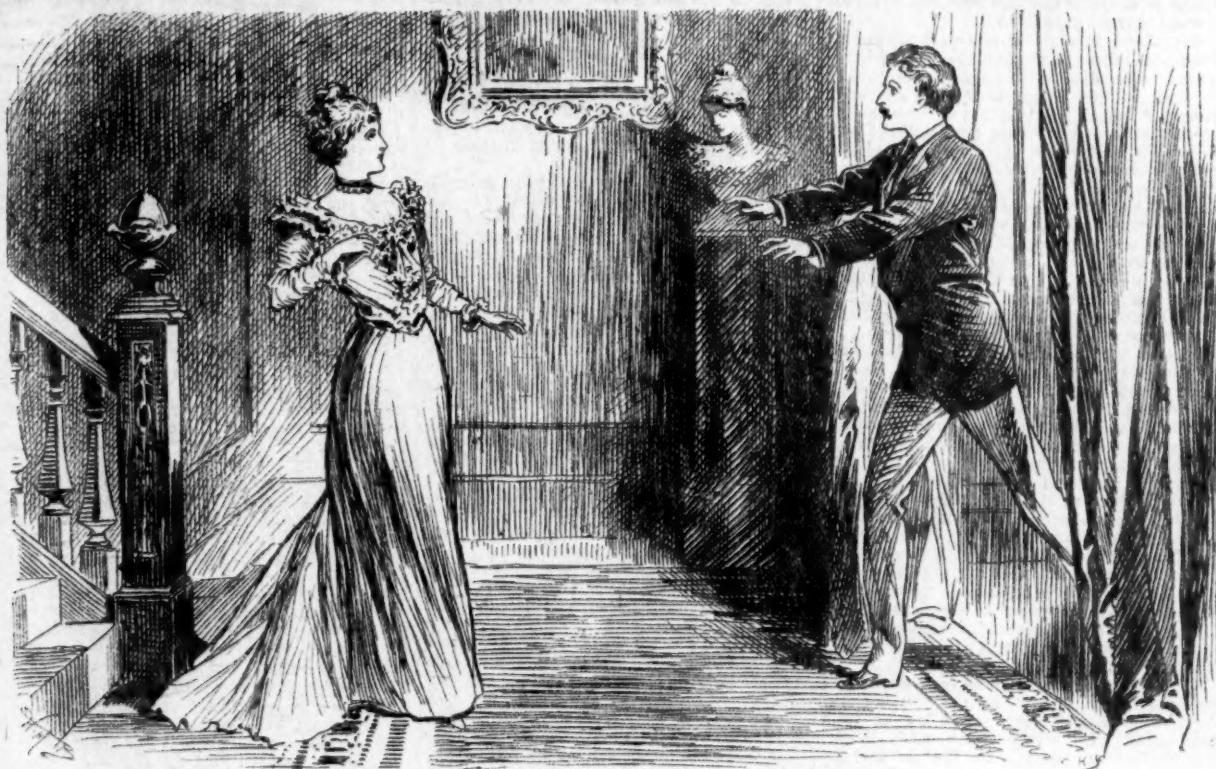
Then he stepped back into the moonlit garden and Meta, who had opened the door unseen, and closed it unheard, stood with wide, open eyes, her hands pressed to her heart, alone in the hall.

"I can trust you!" What did those words mean spoken by Godfrey Somerville to Eleanor Maynard? What could they mean except that there was some secret understanding between them? A secret between two people who hated each other—the idea was ridiculous!

The hatred must be a blind pretence to throw dust into her eyes; and she was being deceived by the girl whom she had hoped to love as a sister, and the man whom she had idolized with the first sweet love of woman, grafted like a wild rose on the everyday affection of cousins.

She clasped her hands together with an irrepressible gesture of pain, and then went back into the drawing-room to do her duty by her guests with the quiet, patient courage of her nature.

(To be continued.)



SHE WAS BEFORE HIM—THE GIRL HE LOVED BEST OF ALL THE WORLD—HAIDÉE.

## REDEEMED BY FATE.

—10—

## CHAPTER VII.

"HAPPY is the bride the sun shines on!" said Muriel to herself, as she stood at the window of her dressing-room, arrayed in all the bravery of wedding garments. "If the reverse hold good, I am afraid there is not much chance of my future bliss."

It was a pouring wet morning—not stormy, not showery—but a ceaseless, continual drizzle, dripping down from leaden-hued skies, converting the streets into sloppy mud, the pavement into slippery gutters, and hiding away all perspective in a damp veil of mist.

Muriel shivered as she turned away. She was not a superstitious girl, but assuredly she would have given a good deal to have had more cheerful sort of weather for her wedding morning. Her wedding-day—the day that was to give her to the man she loved, that was to crown her happiness for ever!

Afterwards she had only a dim idea of how she got through the ceremony; she felt in a dream as she walked up the church on her father's arm, between sea of faces, all eager to catch a glimpse of her through her shrouding laces—in a dream, as she caught sight of Lord Urwicke at the altar rails, looking very patrician, but unnaturally pale, and with surely little of the expression on his features one expects a happy bridegroom to wear!

And yet Muriel looked fair enough if he could but have seen it—fair and stately, and maidenly in her white robes, with the rich fringes of her downcast eyes lying on her pale cheeks—that were paler than ever now through excess of emotion. But she might have been Medusa herself for all the notice he took of her; to him she was simply the daughter of the man who had lent him money on usury—a girl who was willing to sell herself, body and soul, for the sake of a title and position.

At the breakfast everyone noticed how quiet he was; those of his own friends present imagined he was regretting his freedom. Mr. Darley's acquaintances whispered to each other that perhaps if he had married a woman of his own order he might have looked rather more triumphant, but neither bride nor bridegroom were any the wiser for these remarks.

When Muriel came down, attired in her travelling dress of soft grey cloth, her father met her, and put into her hand a roll of parchment, at the same time leading her into a room where the Viscount was waiting.

"My dear," he said, triumphantly, "your husband gave you the Urwicke diamonds for your wedding gift; you shall give him the Urwicke estates for his!"

Muriel looked wonderingly from one to the other, but before she had time to say a word Lord Urwicke took the papers, pulled her arm through his, and hurried her down stairs to the carriage waiting at the door.

Then came a shower of rice, a cloud of old slippers, and they were off to the station—off on the first stage of a new life which opened, alas! most ominously for both.

They had, of course, a first-class carriage to themselves, Lady Urwicke's maid and her husband's valet being in the next compartment. Before starting the Viscount had bought a dozen magazines and newspapers; the former he gave to his wife, the latter he kept for himself, and, leaning back in a corner of the carriage, was soon lost in the pages of the *Field*.

Muriel, hurt and bewildered, looked out of the rain-blurred windows on the misty landscape, with its sodden fields and turbid, overflowing brooks, and asked herself if it was thus men treated the women they loved on their wedding-day. Why, if she had been an utter stranger he could not have shown her more absolute indifference.

"Are you comfortable, Muriel—can I get you anything?" he asked one or twice, and on her replying in the negative, had returned to his

paper, satisfied that he had done his duty, and without making any more efforts at conversation.

Muriel said nothing, pride held her silent, but she was deeply wounded, and very glad when Heathcliff station was reached, and she descended from the train to get into a large stately barouche with the Urwicke arms on its panels, and a footman in the Urwicke livery to open the door for her, while a white headed coachman on the box held in check a pair of spirited bays—Mr. Darley's present to his son-in-law.

The drive was accomplished in silence, but to do Lord Urwicke justice it was with no desire to slight his wife that he did not talk; he imagined, in the bargain they had made, love or its semblance held no part. Of course, in public some sort of appearance must be kept up, but privately the mask might surely be dropped, and each go his or her separate way without reference to the other.

"Here we are!" he said, at last. "This is Urwicke Towers."

Muriel roused herself from her reverie and looked out. They had stopped in front of a large castellated building, having in the centre an immense creaking door, which was now open. In the hall could be seen a row of servants drawn up to receive their new mistress, while on the threshold stood a lady, young and extremely handsome, with flashing black eyes and the form of a Juno. She was dressed in violet-hued silk, a bunch of glowing damask roses at her throat, and somehow the impression she made was like one of Esty's paintings—and Muriel did not admire Esty!

"Welcome!" she exclaimed, coming forward with outstretched hands. "Let me be the first to greet the new Lady Urwicke."

She bent forward and kissed the bride's pale cheeks, and, strange to say, a cold shiver passed through Muriel's whole frame at the touch. Was it possible some prophetic instinct warned her an enemy was nigh, who showed no mercy

either to friend or foe who ever had the misfortune to stand in her way!

Into Lord Urwick's face a dark red colour came as she shook hands with the lady, and proceeded to introduce her to his wife.

"This is Miss Sybill Ruthven," he said, hastily, "I think I have spoken to you of her!"

"We are such old friends, your husband and I," said Sybill Ruthven, smiling, and showing a row of perfectly white and even teeth, "and when I heard you were coming home to-day I could not resist the temptation of driving over. I hope to see a great deal of you in the future."

"You are very good," Muriel responded, speaking with a certain simple dignity that sat very well upon her. Then they all passed into a stately reception room, one of a suite, magnificently furnished, but having the sort of chill in the atmosphere that comes from long disuse.

"I have had a fire lighted in the white drawing room—it is such a miserable day that I thought you would feel damp and depressed," went on Miss Ruthven, leading the way farther on, "and I also ordered dinner to be served in the breakfast-room instead of the dining-room, which is so big and gloomy."

"I have had," "I have ordered"—Muriel looked surprised at the words and tone, which would certainly have become the mistress of the house better than a visitor.

"You are very kind to have taken so much trouble on our behalf," she said, with an indescribable something in her manner that showed she intended assuming her proper place in the house. Then, to her husband, she added, "Be good enough to ring the bell, and ask the housekeeper to show me to my room."

He obeyed; not without some surprise at her quiet dignity, and after closing the door behind her came back, and leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece. Opposite to him stood Sybill Ruthven, the ruddy glow of the firelight shining upon her dark, brilliantly tinted face, and shifting about in a thousand little flashes of light, from the diamonds in her ears to those on her hands.

"Why did you come here to-day?" he exclaimed, passionately. "Did you think your presence could render me any the less miserable!"

"I came because I wanted to know what your wife was like!" she answered, deliberately; "I was rather curious to see the girl you preferred to me."

"Preferred to you!" he repeated, groaning, "I had no choice left me. I could not drag you down into the depths of poverty and disgrace where I had fallen, and so—I raised myself by another's agency."

"Then you did not marry for love—she has not taken my place in your heart!" she exclaimed swiftly, coming to his side, and clasping her hands over his arm, while her dark, passionate eyes gazed earnestly up into his.

"Love—no! I have never loved but one woman—yourself."

"Thank Heaven for that! Now I can feel, if not happy, at least less miserable than I was before," she breathed, sinking down into a chair, and covering her face with her hands.

Upstairs, in her luxurious apartments, Lady Urwick was changing her travelling garb for a dinner dress; but there was none of the tremulous happiness of a few hours' bride in her face as she stood at the glass, gravely contemplating the white-robed image it gave back. Instead of this, a strange shadow lay on her features—the outward token of the cold suspicion and mistrust that had taken possession of her.

When she went down she found Miss Ruthven ready for departure, and the carriage at the door waiting to take her back, and as she drove away, an involuntary sigh of relief escaped Muriel.

The Viscount offered his arm, and they both went in to dinner, which was served in almost oppressive silence. The well-trained servants who waited glanced at each other significantly, as course after course was sent away untouched; and the old butler, who had been in the family over half-a-century, shook his head with a grave suspicion of all not being quite right as he noticed how often his master's glass required re-

plenishing, and how few were the signs of affection passing between the newly-wedded pair.

Muriel felt more and more bewildered at her husband's manner, as the time went on. It was not that he was rude to her, or angry with her; he simply treated her as if she had been a visitor instead of his wife, and the girl's warm heart, that had been overflowing with love and tenderness, grew cold and heavy with an unspeakable fear.

She left him lingering over his wine, and went to the white drawing-room, which was the smallest of the suite, and the most cosy, and there she sat down in front of the fire, and clasping her slim hands across her knees, stared intently into the red glow of the coals. She tried her best to blink away the tears that would come in spite of all her endeavours—she was so young, and her longing for love was so intense.

Coming in half-an-hour later, Lord Urwick found her in the same attitude, but her hand was before her face, so he did not see the glittering drops still hanging on her lashes; and, without appearing to notice her, he seated himself in an armchair opposite, and began absently stroking the silky ears of a collie dog that had slunk in the room after him.

"Do you like your apartments, Muriel?" he asked, feeling it incumbent on him to speak.

"Yes, thank you. They are very pretty," was her gentle response.

"If there should be anything you wish added, or altered, just speak to Mrs. Earle, and she'll see it is done—she is an invaluable housekeeper."

Silence for awhile.

"I'm afraid you are feeling rather dull—it is dull here, but we must get some visitors by-and-by to enliven us a little. I suppose"—with an uneasy laugh—"it would hardly do to begin having visitors the first week we are married."

Silence again.

"Shall I go to the library and get you a book, Muriel?" he asked, constrainedly, and wishing he could contrive an escape to the smoking-room, and there enjoy the masculine consolation of a cigar.

Sitting opposite that quiet, speechless figure down there gave him an uncomfortable sort of feeling.

Muriel slowly withdrew her hand from her face, and looked at him steadily out of her deep grey eyes—a glance of grave questioning, whose meaning he could not fathom.

"Don't you think, Claud, we are behaving in a very unusual fashion for people who have only been married a few hours?"

"What do you mean?"—rather startled.

"What I say—neither more nor less. I am very young, I have had small experience of the world—none at all of your world; but, for all that, I have lived long enough to know that, as a rule, people are not accustomed to feel dull on their wedding-day, or to long for society to help them to enliven it. We must be an exceptional couple, I think!"

"We are an exceptional couple," he rejoined, coldly. "There can be no doubt of that."

"But why should we be—in what way do you mean?"

He stared at her for a moment, surprised at her audacity.

"Well, I take it, few people marry under such circumstances as we have done!"

"Such circumstances! I did not know there was anything peculiar in them. Please enlighten my ignorance."

Lord Urwick was completely taken aback by her demeanour—he regarded it in the light of affection, and it irritated his already chafed spirit. He rose from his seat with a gesture of impatience annoyance.

"I don't know what your motive may be for putting these questions, but they seem to me singularly ill-timed."

"My motive is to obtain information on a point which is of vital importance to me," she interrupted, a thrill of repressed excitement in her voice, "and I shall not be satisfied until you have answered me. I repeat, in what way are we different to others?"

"Since you are so pertinacious I have no alternative but to humour you, even if my reply

may sound brutal in your ears. I presume the generality of people marry for love, whereas we—"

"Well"—as he paused—"we have married for—"

"Mutual convenience—that is the least offensive way of putting it."

She rested backwards, a deadly faintness stealing over her senses, but it was only for a moment she gave way to it; and as Lord Urwick started forward to help her she waved him impertinently away, and stood upright before him, her hands pressed hard against her bosom.

"I think I have been under a misapprehension, but I begin to understand now," she said, in a voice that sounded hard and cold to her listener's ears. "Still, while we are having an explanation, it is better it should be complete. Will you tell me why you married me?"

"Did not your father—"

"Never mind him, if you please. I ask you for an answer, and"—with a short, miserable laugh—"you need not be afraid of hurting my feelings, or wounding my vanity—either will stand a shock, I assure you. I simply want the truth."

"Then you shall have it. I married you—slowly and reluctantly—"Because your father was the mortgages of the Urwick estates, and because he told me if I would make you my wife he would give my heritage back to me, as your dowry."

Muriel looked away from him, and her eyes wandered vacantly round the room. She brought her wandering thoughts back with an effort, endeavouring to make out the sense of those cruel, cruel words—words that cut into her heart like a knife, driven by a sure, swift hand.

Was she mad, and did she imagine these terrible things, or was it true she and her love had been bartered like any bale of merchandise—thrown in the scale with the title deeds of an estate?

She laughed hysterically, and her husband drew back, almost terrified by the look in her eyes, as she turned them upon him. It was the look of a creature who has been outraged, humiliated, whose most sacred feelings have been profaned, into whose shrine sacrilegious feet have entered, and trampled all that is holy under foot!

"I know what my father meant by giving me those documents to-day, and I understand exactly the position I am in," she said with slow distinctness; "but—it is for the first time. When I swore this morning to love you, honour you, obey you, I meant every word I said, and I was utterly ignorant of the reason that led you to marry me. If I had known it, yes, at the last moment—at the very altar itself—I would have turned away, and no inducement in the world should have prevailed upon me to speak the syllable that bound me to you! But regrets are useless now; I am your wife, and nothing I can do or say will make the bond between us less revocable, only—our marriage shall be no more than a name. I will leave you perfectly free to do as you like, live as you like, consider yourself as utterly unfettered as though I did not exist, and all the reparation in my power for the semblance of liberty I take from you I will endeavour to make. As for me—"

She paused a moment, her voice faltering, then went on with increased firmness.

"I shall not forget that I bear your name, and that the honour of a noble family"—was that sentence mockingly emphasised!—"lies in my power. I will never do anything to disgrace it. The world need not know we are less happy than other wedded people of your order; we will go out together sometimes, take our meals together once a day, but for the rest we need not be burdened with each other's society. Thank Heaven! this house is large enough to contain two people without forcing them to run up against each other continually! And now"—feeling that a moment more and her calmness will give way, and she will either scream out in her anguish, or fall in a swoon at his feet—"we have arranged to live as perfect strangers, but on amicable terms, so there is no more to be said. I will

with you good-night—I am tired, and in want of rest."

Silently, like one in a dream, he watched her as she passed through the doorway, white as a snowflake, serene as the moon on a calm summer's night; only when she reached her own room, when there was no chance of anyone seeing her, and no fear of her weakness being guessed, she fell prone on the floor, lifeless and inert, while on her pallid lips trembled words of deepest, bitterest sorrow,—

"My wedding day—my wedding day!"

### CHAPTER VIII.

PHILIP's references having proved satisfactory, he gave up his rooms, packed up the few worldly goods belonging to him, and arrived at Heathcliff one evening in June. A dog-cart had been sent to the station to meet him; so as he drove up the avenue he had a good view of the house that was, for a time at least, to be his home.

It was a large, rather heavy-stone erection, substantially-built, and bearing marks of age in its lichen-tinted front, part of which was covered with ivy. Time had mellowed the grey stones, and lent them a certain beauty that antiquity sometimes gives in return for what it takes away. The grounds were very extensive; in the park herds of deer were browsing under the shadow of mighty trees that had put forth their leaves year after year from time immemorial, while on the other side of the house the park lands sloped down to the sea—the bold, strong Atlantic, whose spray in stormy weather was flung up on the windows in clouds of feathered foam.

Philip was at once conducted to his own apartments, a bed and sitting-room, situated in a rather gloomy corridor, and close to the picture gallery, and here a repast was served, to which his journey inclined him to do ample justice. After it was over, he strolled out to look at the pictures, and was soon absorbed in examining the various specimens of different masters that covered the walls.

The pictures were, for the most part, good ones, but he saw his task would be no sinecure, for all or nearly all were badly in want of renovation.

Towards the end of the gallery was a stained-glass window, emblazoned with the crest of the family, and Philip reached upward to open it in order to look out. As he did so a long hooked nail caught his arm, inflicting rather a deep wound a little above the wrist.

"What a nuisance!" he muttered, pushing back the cuff to avoid getting it stained, for the blood had begun to flow very copiously, and was dripping down on the floor at his feet. At the same moment he looked up, and saw a gentleman standing near him, and gazing at a scarlet arrow-shaped birthmark on his arm with an expression that seemed to him like horror.

"Who are you?" he said in a low voice.

"My name is Philip Greville," replied the young man, surprised at the question, and the manner in which it was asked.

"Of course; what a fool I am!" was the muttered comment of Sir Jasper Ruthven—for it was he. "But what have you done to your arm?"

"Only scratched it against the hook there. It is nothing."

"You will think me a coward very likely, but, to say the truth, I have a perfect horror of the sight of blood," added the Baronet with a forced laugh; "and when I came upon you and saw it dripping down I was quite startled. I must tell you this gallery has the reputation of being haunted, and as I had entirely forgotten you were expected this evening I didn't know whether to attribute your appearance to a supernatural agency."

He seemed to be trying to laugh away the strange impression he was aware his greeting must have left on Philip; but in this he only partially succeeded, for to the artist there seemed yet something constrained and ill-at-ease in his manner.

"We may as well look over the pictures,

together," continued Sir Jasper; "and I can tell you which I want copied—unless you are too tired!"

Greville denied being tired, so they spent some time in the gallery, and afterwards went downstairs, where Philip was introduced to Miss Ruthven, who he decided at once would make a splendid model for a Jeal, a Judith, an Herodias, or any of those biblical women who have distinguished themselves by acts of cruel daring.

She did not trouble herself to notice the artist very much, but her brother was extremely affable and pleasant, and seemed to take an interest in leading Philip to speak of his own affairs, his education, and boyhood—topics on which the young man spoke unreservedly enough.

"By the bye, Sybil," observed Sir Jasper, later on in the evening, "where is Mr. Greville to sleep?"

"I believe the housekeeper has given him two rooms at the end of the china gallery, so as to be near the pictures," she answered, without looking up from her book.

"Then she had no business to do so!"

"Why not?"

"You know perfectly well the evil reputation the place has acquired," he said, rather embarrassed.

"Yes; but I am surprised you should be credulous enough to listen to servants' idle chatter, nay, even encourage it, as you do!" returned Sybil, with some asperity. "It is all very well to frighten children with tales of ghosts, but grown-up men and women should be able to laugh at such utter nonsense."

"Very true, but for all that the place is lonely at night—it is away from the rest of the household."

"Hermann sleeps there," said his sister coldly, and dropped her eyes on her book as if the discussion were ended.

"You see, Miss Ruthven is determined you should have the benefit of the haunted wing, so I suppose there is no more to be said," laughed Sir Jasper, turning to Philip, who had listened with some surprise to the dialogue, in which, of course, he had been passive. However, in the end, he retained the room first allotted to him, and Sir Jasper said no more about their being changed.

His time for the next week was fully taken up in executing a copy of one of the pictures, and as he took an interest in his work the days did not pass unpleasantly. In effect, the best thing for him just now was to have something to occupy his thoughts, and drive from them the image of Haldée, which, sleeping or waking, haunted him constantly.

His painting was rarely interrupted, except, indeed, occasionally by a middle-aged German servant named Hermann, who seemed to have nothing particular to do in the household, and sometimes came to watch him at his labours.

So the days went on until he had been nearly a fortnight at Heathcliff Priory. In that time he managed to make himself tolerably familiar with Sir Jasper's household, and had chanced on a discovery concerning Miss Ruthven, which was that the young lady was not happy.

A strange feverish sort of unrest had taken possession of her; she would wander up and down the terrace in front of the house for hours together, her hands clasped behind her back, her eyes bent on the ground; her manner full of an absorbed preoccupation that seemed to breed on one idea to the exclusion of all others.

And yet, so great were her powers of self-control, that when visitors came they were never allowed to notice anything unusual in her; she was bright, vivacious, full of that gaiety which had done even more than her beauty towards gaining her the title of "belle of the county."

"We are going for to be gay, Mr. Greville," observed Hermann, one evening, as he watched Philip at work; "a visitor came this afternoon, and next week there are to be dinner-parties, and garden-parties, and I know not what."

"I don't expect they will make much difference to us," responded the artist, gaily; "we

shall have to toll on—at least I shall; you don't appear to be overworked."

The German grunted, and Philip added—

"What office are you supposed to fill in the household? You spend most of your time in your room."

"I am the confidential man of Sir Jasper Ruthven," answered Hermann, nodding his head sagely. "But don't be too curious, Herr Artist, people get on the best way mind their own concerns"—a piece of philosophy Philip did not attempt to dispute, but he gazed rather curiously after the man as he took his departure, apparently determined not to run the risk of any more questions.

It had been very hot all day; outside, even in the fresh air, the leaves drooped with tired languor, and the flowers hung down their heads as if to get out of sight of the sunshine, but here in the gallery the atmosphere was close and stuffy, and Philip felt, unless he escaped from it for awhile, he would presently find himself the victim of a severe headache.

"I shall work all the better after I have had a walk in the park to freshen me up," he said to himself, as he put away his palette and sheet of brushes, and then made his way to the broad oak stairs leading into the hall.

On the landing was a large, recessed window, screened by falling draperies of lace and silk, that looked out on the park, and inside this Philip stepped for the purpose of seeing if there was any sign of the "visitor" or Sir Jasper and his sister.

No, there was not a soul visible, so there was nothing to hinder him from taking his purposeful ramble, only just as he came to the conclusion he heard the click-clack of a woman's high-heeled slippers descending the stairs, and peeping out—not with any great amount of curiosity—saw coming towards him a slim, graceful figure in a pale blue dinner-dress, with a cluster of scarlet flowers in her corn-hued hair, and a brookn of the same nestling amid the laces of her corsage.

He put his hand to his eyes and rubbed them, wondering if they had deceived him, or if he were dreaming, and then being assured that both these fears were groundless, he took a step forward, and held out his arms, with the light of a great love shining in his eyes.

All remembrance of his poverty was forgotten, all considerations of prudence were flung to the winds, and for the moment he only knew she was before him—the girl he loved best of all the world—Haldée!

Yes, it was she, as much surprised as himself at the meeting, but, as it seemed, equally glad. After a moment she withdrew herself from his arms, blushing divinely, and stood a little distance away, while his eyes drank in the flower-like beauty of her face with all a lover's rapture.

"What brings you here?" she exclaimed; and as few words as possible he related the circumstances under which he had come.

"And you?" he added, as he concluded. "You are the very last person I should have expected to meet."

"Sir Jasper Ruthven is an old friend of papa's, and persuaded him to let me come on a visit to his sister," answered Haldée; "and I was very glad to accept the invitation," she added, looking down, "for I was miserable at your letter, and wanted to get away from the place that reminded me of you. It was a cruel letter, Philip!"

"My dearest," he said, eagerly, "it was cruel to myself, but I thought it best for you. How could I hold you to an engagement—poor, nameless as I am!"

Her lips curled a little scornfully.

"And do you think my affection depends upon such considerations as those? If so, it seems to me worth very little indeed."

"It is worth all the world to me," he exclaimed, fervently.

"Then why were you so anxious to give it up?" she asked childishly, tears of wounded pride rising to her eyes, and falling down on her clasped hands. "You don't know how unhappy

your letter made me. It did not even give an address to which I might have written, to tell you how my heart sympathised with the trouble that had come upon you, and how I wished I could do something to help you."

"Darling, how could I act otherwise, when I knew if I approached your father in the character of your lover I should be laughed to scorn? Candidly now, do you think he would have consented to our betrothal?"

Candidly she did not, for she remembered sundry conversations she had had with him of late, in which he had impressed upon her the desirability of making a marriage in accordance with her own wealth and position, and had even hinted at a prospective husband he had in view for her.

"Still," added Philip, rightly interpreting her silence, "if you will only be true to me not all the fathers in the world shall part us. But we shall have to wait, Haldée, and also to keep our engagement secret, for if it were discovered there would be no chance of our seeing each other again."

"Then," said Haldée, quickly, "Sir Jasper had better not know we have met before, for if he did he would assuredly tell papa."

At that moment the first dinner bell rang, and there was a rustle of silk skirts in the distance.

"It is Miss Rathven," breathed Haldée. "I must go."

"But you must contrive to meet me soon," whispered Philip, hurriedly, "so that we may have a long talk, and I don't know of a better rendezvous than this recess. Write and make an appointment, darling, and put your letter under this bust"—indicating one of Flora, on a pedestal nodd.

Haldée nodded assentingly, and she had only just time to get downstairs before Miss Rathven appeared, exquisitely attired as usual; for whatever her mental anxieties might be they did not go the length of making her neglect her toilette.

She did not notice Philip, who afterwards went down to the grounds, and wandered about thinking over this new freak of fortune that had thrown Haldée and himself together under such very unforeseen circumstances.

He felt it would be impossible to return and settle down to work again to-night, so he left the gardens and got out on the cliff, where he stood looking down on the foam-created waves of the wide Atlantic rolling in below.

Just here the cliffs were very steep and the footpath was rather perilously near the edge, which shelved over a sheer descent of over a hundred feet.

Philip grew dizzy with looking down and drew back.

"Not a very pleasant place for a fall," he said to himself, and began descending some steps cut out of the rock that led to the pebbly beach below.

How solitary it was with nothing before him but that wide sweep of sea reaching to the horizon, and the rocks rising, dark and majestic, in a semi-circle at his back!

One might have imagined oneself miles away from any human habitation, and yet, as a matter of fact, Heathcliff Priors was quite close.

Suddenly Philip heard a sound behind, and turning sharply round, came face to face with the German servant.

"Hermann!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "How the deuce did you get here?"

He knew he had not descended the steps, and the incoming tide had shut off all other visible means of approach.

"How the deuce I get here!" repeated the man angrily. "I get here de proper way, of course. What for you ask? Did not I tell you, you do well to mind your own business? If you interfere with mine, I tell Sir Jasper."

"Ah! if you want to make a mystery of it do so, and welcome," replied the young artist, laughing good-humouredly. "Only you need not get in a temper over a simple question; it's hardly worth while."

Hermann took his way up the steps, grumbling audibly in his native tongue, while Philip lighted a cigar, and sat down to smoke it until the incoming tide forced him away.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE next night Lord and Lady Urwicke came over to dine at Heathcliff Priors, and Haldée, with her usual childish impulsiveness, instantly took a great fancy to Muriel.

"She is so fair and statuesque—she looks like a tall Annunciation Lily," she said to Sir Jasper, by whose side she sat at the dining table, with its fruits and flowers in crystal dishes, its cut glass, and massive plate. "Don't you admire her, Sir Jasper?"

He shook his head and smiled.

"I can't say that I do exactly. She is always the same; perfectly dignified, perfectly sweet tempered, and perfectly calm. You are right in calling her statuesque, for the Venus de Milo, come down from her pedestal, and clothed in nineteenth-century garments, could hardly be more unemotional."

"I don't know," said Haldée, who was pretty keen-sighted, in spite of her youth and inexperience. "I have an idea that those calm grey eyes of hers could flash and darken with the most passionate feeling, and sensitively curved lips like that are usually the index of a deep and vivid nature."

"You speak like an oracle, fair Haldée! Who taught you to read countenances, thus?" inquired her host, with a smile.

Haldée blushed, without replying, and Sir Jasper thought he had never seen anything so lovely as that bright, fleeting colour. In point of fact, the Baronet was fast losing his head and heart, or that part of the latter which had not been frizzled away years ago, in a hundred different amours, whose effect had been to leave on his mind a cynical impression of the utter worthlessness of women in general. But Haldée was different to anyone with whom he had ever been brought into contact; she was so pure, so childlike in her innocence, and, above all, so surpassingly beautiful, that she had inspired him with a passion that would trample down ruthlessly every obstacle that might interpose between them.

He was resolved, at all hazards, to make her his wife; but he determined first of all to win her love, and he had prevailed upon her father to let her come to Heathcliff Priors, because he fancied that under his own roof he would have every opportunity of making her care for him.

When the ladies went in the drawing-room, leaving the masculine portion of the guests sitting over their wine, Haldée took her place by Muriel's side, and began talking to her. She soon became convinced her estimate of Lady Urwicke's character was a true one—this was no iceberg, but rather indeed a Galatea, waiting for Pygmalion to kiss her sleeping soul to life!

It is true Muriel was not popular in the neighbourhood, and yet the neighbourhood no longer gave voice to any of those sneers with which it had greeted the announcement of Lord Urwicke's marriage to an attorney's daughter.

Those ladies who had called at Urwicke Towers with the amiable intention of patronising the Viscountess, quickly found their mistake, for Muriel received them with the stately grace of a young empress, and it at once became evident that, whatever her ancestors, Lady Urwicke at least was "thoroughbred" all over, and perfectly well qualified to fill the position her marriage gave her.

Her husband watched her in astonishment, and reluctantly confessed he could not have chosen a wife who would more worthily have upheld her rank than did this plebeian daughter of a money-lender.

The young couple had rigidly adhered to the line Muriel had marked out, and each went their own way, independent of the other.

No one would have guessed from Lady Urwicke's calm exterior the anguish of wounded love and outraged pride that lay beneath, so well had she learned her woman's lesson of concealment.

All the good she could do in the way of visiting the sick and helping the needy she did, while her husband went out riding and driving or playing billiards with sundry bachelor friends whose society he frequented. But for all that, Cland

Urwicke was a different man from what he had been before his marriage, and it seemed as if the lesson he had received had pointed its own moral. He had entirely severed his connection with the turf, given up gambling, and did his best to improve his estate, which had been for so long neglected.

Altogether he was a changed character, and his friends often rallied him on it. They did so this particular evening.

"Come, Cland, why don't you fill up your glass?" exclaimed Sir Jasper, pushing the decanter towards him. "Doesn't your wife like your drinking, or has 'Benedick, the married man' reformed on his own account?"

"There was plenty of room for reformation, was there not?" said the Viscount, with a short laugh.

"Well, however that may be, I shan't become a convert through your example!" put in another of the guests, bluntly. "Marriage certainly hasn't improved you, for you were decidedly a much pleasanter fellow before, and—hang it all! you don't even look happy!" which was perfectly true.

"Wildair hits rather hard!" observed Sir Jasper, rising, and thinking it time to put an end to these personalities. "Come, let us join the ladies!"

In the drawing-room Sybil Rathven was sitting on a settee, looking really handsome in deep amber robes that would have been sufficiently trying to a beauty less brilliant, but became her admirably. Above her brow and round her throat blazed a red fire of priceless rubies.

She made a slight coquettish gesture, which Urwicke obeyed, after a moment's hesitation, and a glance in the direction of his wife, to whom Sir Jasper was talking.

"I hope Mr. Greville's abilities are equal to his work," Muriel was saying, and neither she nor Sir Jasper noticed the start Haldée gave on hearing her lover's name mentioned.

"Ah! yes, he is evidently clever at his profession," responded Sir Jasper. "You know him, do you not?"

"A little. I thought I might possibly have seen him here. I have a message for him."

"Indeed! I will ask him to come down," said the Baronet, looking at her rather searchingly. "He might have joined us at dinner if I had thought of it, but Sybil arranged the table, and I suppose it did not strike her to include him!"

Accordingly the Baronet went in search of Philip, who promised to come down as soon as he had changed his clothes.

"Have you known Mr. Greville long?" inquired the Baronet of Lady Urwicke, on his return to her side.

"Personally I have known him a very short time, but I have known of him all my life," she answered. "A sister of my father's adopted him when he was a child of five or six."

"Was he a relative then?"

"No, my aunt made the acquaintance of his mother when on a visit to Wales, and she died very suddenly, leaving her boy absolutely alone."

"Quite a romantic history," commented Sir Jasper, taking up Muriel's big white feather fan and carelessly unfurling it. "What may the name of the village have been?"

"Llan—, Llan—, Llantrassan, I think."

Just then Philip entered, and put an end to the conversation. It was the first time Haldée had seen him in evening dress, and her little heart began to beat quickly and proudly, as she thought how handsome and noble looking he was.

Lady Urwicke greeted him with unwonted cordiality—a fact to which Sybil Rathven smilingly called her husband's attention, and presently they withdrew into a window recess, under pretence of looking at the moonlit landscape; but really for the purpose of enabling her to give a small parcel into his hands, without being observed.

"It is the packet of letters of which you spoke," she said. "My father found them put carefully away among my aunt's papers, and sent them to me at my request. There is also a

miniature, which I should imagine to be that of your mother, for it is very like you."

Philip thanked her, and eager to see the picture held it up so that the light should fall upon it. At the same moment Sir Jasper looked over his shoulder.

"Studying the likeness of your lady-love, Mr. Greville? Is she pretty? If so, pray let me have a peep."

Philip was much annoyed at this rude curiosity; however, he had no alternative but to hand the miniature to the Baronet, who took it and examined it with only a faint appearance of interest.

It was the portrait of a beautiful girl of about twenty, blue-eyed, chestnut-haired, and with a singularly sweet expression.

"I admire your taste—she is pretty," said the Baronet, returning it—and Philip noticed his hand trembled slightly, as he held it out.

"Do you feel inclined for a walk in the grounds, Lady Urwick?" he continued, turning to her. "It is a fine evening, and the sea is sure to look lovely in the moonlight."

He acquiesced and stepped through the open French window, following, while Philip stood near Haldée—to whom Miss Ruthven had introduced him that morning—and enjoyed a few minutes of stolen pleasure.

Sybil Ruthven and Lord Urwick also went towards the window, but did not venture outside, where the moon-washed flowers were nodding their sleepy heads, and mignonette sending up its scent in strong, sweet clouds.

"Cloud!" exclaimed Sybil, in a passionate whisper, as she placed her hand on his sleeve. "You are unhappy! It is useless for you to attempt a denial. I, who know you so well can see it written on your face."

"I don't wish to deny it," moodily, and with his eyes cast down.

"You are regretting your bondage," she went on; "you are tied to an iceberg, a piece of marble, and the chain galls you more every day of your life. Oh! my poor Claud, if Fate had only willed things otherwise—if I had but been your wife, I would have made your life so different—my whole endeavour should have been for your happiness! Whereas, this cold creature, this woman whose ambition would be satisfied with nothing less than a coronet—"

"Hush!" he interrupted, hastily, "say nothing against her. She was deceived as well as I, and, this much I know, she is a hundred times too good for me!"

Sybil stared at him aghast, and a dark look came across her face.

"What? you practising the rôle of penitent? That is a novelty, and shows your low-born wife has already obtained some influence over you!"

"Low-born or not, she is a lady, and pure and modest to her heart's core," he said, with a certain doggedness, and an emphasis on the last words.

Sybil silently retreated into the shadow of the curtains, pressing her hand against her heart in impotent fury.

"He is getting to tolerate her, next he will admire then love," she said to herself, with blanched lips. "Oh! men, men, you do well to charge us with fickleness, you who are changeable as the wind itself! I see clearly how it is. At present he still cares for me, and is under my sway; but in another month, unless something be done, he will have passed beyond my reach for ever, whereas I shall go on loving to the end of my life. 'Pure and modest to her heart's core,' he said—how I should delight in showing him she was neither the one or the other!"

Lord Urwick made no efforts to rejoin her; he was thinking over the words, and wondering if it would have been possible for Muriel to have uttered them to a married man. No! under no circumstances in the world would she ever have done it. "Low-born" he himself had called her, but, for all that, he knew she was a woman in whose hands a husband might trust his honour with the perfect confidence of its being kept unstained.

(To be continued.)

## OPALS AND DIAMONDS.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE RECTOR'S DAUGHTERS.

The clock at Wingfield Parsonage—the long sentry-box clock, which stood in the quaint old oak-panelled hall—had just struck eleven as Maggie Randal flew up the trim gravel path leading to the house, and swung herself lightly through the open window into the dingy parlour, where her three sisters were sitting, busily engaged shaping and stitching flannel garments for their father's poor parishioners.

"Girls, girls, what do you think? Such grand news!" she cried, her violet eyes dancing and sparkling with delight, her little scarlet mouth quivering with excitement.

"We can't think, Mag, we have too much to do. Tell us what it is!" responded her eldest sister, Kate, lifting her plain, good-natured face, and smiling at her interlocutor.

"No, no; you must guess."

"How can we guess?" demanded Maud, the second of Mr. Randal's children, fastening her blue eyes on Maggie's face, with a look that was not altogether cordial. "We can't run about Wingfield all the morning gossiping and chattering, hearing the bits of scandal and news. We know next to nothing of what is going on there, so—"

"Well, you needn't be cross about it!" interrupted the baby of the family, with a toss of her little fair head, in whose soft rings and curls a rich, gold shade lurked.

"I'm not cross," responded the other; "but it's quite impossible to know what your news is. Mrs. Bell may be the mother of a family; Miss Lynch may have made advances to Laura's young man again; or, perhaps, happy thought, the Balines are going to give another tea-fight."

"Pooh! It's something much more important than that!"

"What is it, then?"

"Guess once more."

"I can't. Tell, Mag!"

"Well," replied the young girl, with an air of great importance; "well, the Molyneuxes are coming back from Italy, and the Hall is being furnished up grandly! What do you think of that?"

"Think! Why I think it is a splendid bit of news!" cried Maud, joyously, while Kate, and even quiet Laura, ejaculated "Oh!" and "Really!" and looked elated.

"Who told you?"

"Mrs. Britton."

"That is good authority."

"Yes. As she is their housekeeper, I suppose she ought to know."

"Of course! When do they come?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"So soon! That will be delightful!"

"Won't it be glorious! We shall have some fun and gaiety now, I hope, to wake up this dull little spot."

"I hope so, I'm sure. But I don't quite see why you should be so excited about it, Mag."

"Why?"

"Because you are already engaged, therefore debarred from entering in the race for the catch of the county," replied Maud, her eyes resting once more somewhat coldly on her younger sister's lovely, blonde face.

"Who said I was going to join in the race?" demanded Maggie, angrily. "Because I have promised to marry Terence O'Hara, is that any reason why I should be shut out from dances and tennis parties, and amusements that all girls like?"

"Of course not! Only engaged people, when they really love one another, don't care, I fancy, for going out much, or for anything save billing and cooing in dim, quiet corners. Perhaps, though, my dear, you are an exception to the rule," she concluded, with a little spiteful laugh.

"Perhaps I am," retorted the youngest Miss Randal, sharply, with heightened colour and flashing eyes. "At any rate, I don't intend to

refuse any invitations I may get to the Hall, whether Terence be asked or not."

"I didn't imagine you would."

"Do they intend to remain in England now for good?" inquired Laura, anxious to avert the storm of words she saw impending between the two sisters, who shared the beauty of the family between them.

"Yes," answered Maggie, easily diverted from her wrath and indignation. "Sir Lionel, Mrs. Britton says, is quite strong now. Ten years in the South has cured the weakness of his lungs; and as he is eager to live on the estate, and do his duty as a landowner, they will remain here for good, unless, of course, he finds the climate too severe for him."

"I wonder if Bunice will be glad to get back to England!"

"I am sure she will," observed Kate. "She is too strong and vigorous to care for the languid life of the South."

"Has she written to you lately?"

"Not for a whole year!"

"Then, perhaps, they don't intend to be on the same friendly terms with us that they used to be," said Maggie, dolefully.

"I hope they will be," cried Maud, quickly. "We found the difference when they went away. Lady Molyneux was so generous, always sending us presents. I devoutly hope she will continue to charitably remember 'the poor at her gates,' and send us fruit, flowers, and game."

"They won't be her 'gates' now. Sir Lionel was fifteen when they went away; he is five-and-twenty at the present time, and of course master. He may not be charitably disposed."

"We must subjugate him, then," replied Maud, complacently, looking at herself in the little old-fashioned mirror hanging over the mantelshelf, and appearing quite satisfied with what she saw.

"It may be a hard task. His mother will perhaps object to his subjugation."

"Do you really think she would, Kate? I thought his word was law, and that as a boy every whim and fancy was gratified!"

"So they were; but there was a reason for denying him nothing."

"What was it?"

"Well, if I tell you," said Kate, rather reluctantly, as she rolled up her work and proceeded to help Laura spread the cloth for dinner, "you must promise never to breathe a word to anyone about it."

"We promise," cried her sisters.

"Then the reason is that there is madness in the Molyneux family. It breaks out in every other generation, and invariably among the male members. There has never been a woman of the family known to go mad. It is due to appear in the present generation, and Lady Molyneux was warned by their medical man to neither cross nor refuse anything to her only son, as the result of any mental annoyance or trouble would be fatal to his sanity."

"How dreadful!" ejaculated Laura.

"I suppose, then, by this time he is rather an insufferable specimen of humanity, having been such a spoilt child," remarked Maud, reflectively.

"I hardly think so," answered Miss Randal. "He was very sweet-tempered as a boy—of a most amiable and lovable disposition, one not easily spoiled."

"Let us hope he is still so. It will give us a better chance of benefiting by their return. And now, girls," she added, as their one rather ancient and broken-down retainer, Anne, entered the room, bearing a dish, on which was a veritable, grim scrag of cold mutton, garnished with overgrown lettuces, "we will discuss our frugal repast. Rather more frugal than usual, I may premise, owing to the absence of our parent, who has the good fortune to be lunching with Mr. Travers, and therefore escapes the respectable middle-class pauper's usual dinner of cold mutton;" and with a gay laugh, Maud seated herself at the table, and commenced cutting substantial slices of bread from a huge home-made loaf.

Her sisters followed suit, smiling at her remarks, and soon the grim scrag disappeared, or the greater part of it, for health and spare

diet made them relish anything, and, above all, they were not accustomed to kickshaws orainties.

Their father, and sole-surviving parent, the Rev. John Randal, was not over-burdened with this world's goods. He was rector of the small country parish of Wingfield, beautifully situated amid verdant valleys, winding streams, and green hills, five miles from the thriving town of Inchfield.

The living was a poor one, and Mr. Randal was a studious, religious man, giving all he could, and more, perhaps, than he actually ought to have, to his poverty-stricken parishioners—poverty-stricken and neglected through the absence of the owner of the land, Sir Lionel Molyneux, and the greed of his agent, a hard, grasping man, who ground down the tenants, exacting the rent from them the day it was due to the uttermost farthing, and never giving them at Christmas, or during the coldest winter, so much even as a pair of blankets, a bundle of flannel, or a load of wood.

The rector did his best to supply the wants of his poor people, plying his vocation with an earnest godliness that won for him the affection and respect of all who knew him. He adhered strictly to all the duties of his sacred calling and spared himself in no way.

He could not afford a curate, so the work fell heavily on him. He was helped as much as possible by Kate, his eldest child, a plain, sensible girl of twenty-seven, and by Laura, his third daughter, some five years her junior, who threw her whole heart and soul into the parish work, the Sunday-school, and everything connected with the church, because she had a "calling" that way, and also because she was engaged to be married to Walter Landor, curate to Mr. Travers, rector of a neighbouring parish, and as she had foreseen dancing, party-going, high heels, gay dresses, and all the other pomps and vanities of this wicked world she occupied her time in doing good and qualifying for a parson's wife.

From his second and fourth daughters Mr. Randal did not receive much help; though Maud who was very clever with her needle, occasionally, when she was not engaged in making dainty dresses of an inexpensive kind for herself or her two sisters, who still attired themselves in a mundane fashion, helped to stitch wonderful little flannel garments for the ever arriving, ever unwelcome babies of the parishioners; but Maggie, just in her seventeenth year, violet-eyed, golden-haired Maggie, so like the wife he had loved and lost three years after her birth, never had given any help, and probably never would.

She was a butterfly—a gay, brilliant butterfly—able only to live in the sunshine, and lead an idle, useless life. She had been spoilt by Kate and her father, and her brilliant beauty seemed to unfit her for any rough work, any useful occupation.

Notwithstanding their poverty, she always wore bright, dainty dresses, made for her by Maud, who was somewhat jealous of the young sister, nine years her junior, whose glowing loveliness eclipsed her good looks, and made them fade into insignificance.

The second Miss Randal, though, was a very pretty girl. Her eyes were blue as summer skies, her hair a pretty flaxen, her skin beautifully fair; yet what are blue eyes compared to violet, that wonderful violet that seems of a velvety blackness sometimes!—and what, does flaxen hair look like beside those rich corn-coloured tresses we see adorning the heads of some favoured mortals! Then the colouring of Maggie's skin was richer and fresher, and about every gesture and action was a nameless charm, a girlish grace, that made her irresistible to male members of the community, and gave her sister cause for jealousy.

This jealousy had not, however, given much outward and visible sign until the previous autumn, when Terence O'Hara, an artist, had come to Wingfield to sketch some pretty bits of scenery, and had made the acquaintance of the rector, and was in due course introduced to his daughters. The young Irishman showed somewhat plainly that he admired Maud, paying her marked attentions; and that rather vain young

woman had visions floating before her mental eye of a proposal, and then of a neat little house shared with Terence, for she had contrived to discover that he had a little over a hundred a year, besides what he made by his paintings—and he was considered something of a rising genius—so she was quite ready to exchange her state of single blessedness and the humdrum life at the old Parsonage for Terence and a brand new suburban villa! But alas! for her hopes and dreams.

Maggie had been staying in London for a month or two with Mrs. Pattison, her father's sister, and on her return to Wingfield this hard son of Erin basely deserted his first love, and showed unmistakably that her younger sister had won his affections. In less than six weeks he had won her, and obtained a shy "yes" from her rosy lips, and gained her father's rather reluctant consent to their engagement. Mr. Randal found it very hard, always had, to deny anything to his youngest and best-loved child, so had given his consent when she pleaded for it; but he would not hear of a marriage for a year or two, until Maggie was seventeen or eighteen, and he did not altogether like his son-in-law elect.

O'Hara was gentlemanly and handsome, singularly so, with wavy chestnut hair, a long curling beard and heavy moustache, and a pair of eyes, blue, as only true bred Irish orbs ever are. They were black-lashed, well-placed eyes, yet in their sure depth was a look of lurking devilry and passion, that made one feel destiny would make him either a very good man, if she smiled on him, or a very bad one if she frowned. For him there would be no middle course; it would be for weal or woe. In a dim sort of way Mr. Randal realised this, and half-feared trusting his daughter's future to such hands, but he had little or nothing to leave her or her sisters, and knew that it would be to her advantage to be married and have a legal protector.

Besides, there was no tangible fault to be found with the young fellow. He had some little property of his own, was rising in his profession, worked diligently, went to church regularly, which was, of course, a recommendation in the rector's eyes, and proved himself a most devoted and attentive lover.

About his affection for his little *fiancée* there could be no doubt. He simply idolised her, was never happy out of her presence, and was a perfect slave to every wish and whim. His love for her overpowered every other feeling, his whole life seemed to draw light and colour from it, his passion made him weak and yielding in all that concerned Maggie, and when Mr. Randal made the proviso that the engagement should be kept secret, Terence agreed to it, though he did not like the stipulation, because he feared her father would not give his consent else.

The old gentleman had been prompted to this by Maud. He was too unworldly, too visionary, to have thought of such a thing himself; but his second daughter, practical, worldy and ambitious, looking far ahead, knew that her sister's rare loveliness would probably win her a titled admirer, and she thought it would be a pity in that case to have her engagement to an artist of mediocre repute made public, because she reasoned a private engagement could be broken off much more easily than a public one, and, of course, a rich marriage would be beneficial to the whole family, while an alliance with O'Hara would only provide a home for one.

Besides, she owed Terence a grudge for deserting her after his plainly-shown devotion. The young man little knew what a demon of hate and malice his conduct had raised in the breast of the woman he had slighted; a demon that nothing would lay save an ample revenge. She was wild with rage at being jilted and passed over, though she gave no outward sign of the inward fury that possessed her, but she exerted all her powers of persuasion, made her father do as she pleased; and none of the Wingfield gossip knew that beautiful Maggie Randal had promised to become Terence O'Hara's wife at some future time, a time to which he looked forward with passionate longing, and to which she did not look forward at all.

Almost a child in years and ideas, she gave no

serious thought to the future. A lover seemed to her to be a very desirable thing to possess; a person who always smiled at and petted her, was ever ready as an escort, gave her heaps of trinkets and bon-bons, and gloves, and bouquets, who always sought to amuse and please her, and who deferred to her in a manner that was extremely pleasing to one so young and inexperienced.

Then it was delightful to wander in the woods with him, looking for the first flowers of spring, the modest violet, the fair snowdrop and starry primrose.

It was a pleasant change from the society of her sisters, who, though they all spoilt her more or less, were wont sometimes to chide her gently for the useless life she led; and Laura would try to induce her to accompany her on her errands of charity, and carry beef-tea and bibles to her poor people, with their large and ever-increasing families; but Maggie would refuse, making a wry face and declaring that she could not possibly go into the cottages unless Laura first gave to each and every villager a bar of yellow soap and a good strong scrubbing-brush, wherewith the recipients might first clean themselves and their dwellings; and when rebuked for this levity she would declare, with a charming, innocent smile, "that she could not be good, though it seemed to come so natural to her sisters, to potter about, distributing tracts and tobacco to the gouty old men, and tea and flannel to the rheumatic old women, and that it was no use bothering her, as she hadn't a "calling that way"; so after awhile, when Terence appeared upon the scene, they gave up "bothering her," and left her at liberty to wander in Wingfield Woods with her lover, and listen to his impassioned wooing and his soft nothings.

## CHAPTER II.

### A LOVER'S PARTING.

"WHERE are you going, Mag?" asked Kate, as her youngest sister rose from the table after the grim scrag had been discussed, and the overgrown lettuces demolished.

"Out to the woods," was the laconic reply.

"Take care of yourself, don't go too far!" admonished the elder.

"Oh, I shall be all right!"

"Yes," chimed in Maud. "I suppose Terence will be there to mount guard and look after you!"

"I suppose he will," agreed the young *fiancée* coolly, adjusting her old straw hat, with its dismated looking wreath of buttercups, before the quaint mirror.

"You are a lucky girl! I wish I had nothing to do but wander about in the sunshine idly the whole day through;" and Maud sighed enviously as she picked up a little scarlet flannel petticoat and began stitching away at it vigorously.

"I wish you had, my dear, also. The best thing you can do is to marry a rich husband; then you can idle as much as you like, and he clothed in purple and fine linen as well."

"I've been trying to do that for some years past, and haven't succeeded! Rich men are not like blackberries, plentiful in and about Wingfield. If, however, any come within my ken you may be perfectly certain that I shall do my best to impress them with a due sense of my manifold charms."

"Sir Lionel Molyneux, for example."

"Well, yes! only I'm afraid I shouldn't stand much chance against you. Your superior attractions would win the day!" and she gazed with reluctant admiration at the fresh young face before her that looked so bewitching under the shade of the old garden hat.

"How inconsistent you are!" said Maggie, slowly, as though reflecting. "A short time ago you said his coming could make no difference to me, as my engagement debarred me from trying for the prize, and now you say I should win the day!"

"So I should think you would!" replied her sister, in no way abashed. "And surely you wouldn't be gosse enough to let such a half-and-half sort of engagement as yours stands in the

way of your being my lady, and mistress of such a splendid place as Molyneux Hall?"

"I don't know. I think I am too fond of Terence!" and then, as though wishing to end the discussion, Maggie took up a sciled, faded sunshade which was quite out of keeping with her pretty blue dress and long tan-coloured suede gloves (O'Hara's last present), and stepped into the garden, through the French window.

It was a bright, glorious day, the air clear, and full of fresh warmth; the tender green leaves and budding trees were kissed by the gentle breeze. The lilacs were blossoming, the blackthorns white with bloom, the laburnums wore their spring livery of green and gold, the beeches showed their dark, purple foliage; in a huge yew tree a thrush was singing loudly, and up in the oaks the blackbirds whistled, as if trying to express their delight in the beauty of the day, and their indifference to care and sorrow. The whole atmosphere was sweet with the odour of newly-turned hay, and the perfume of flowers and budding leaves; yet the young girl, as she strolled slowly on, never lifted her eyes to look around. She was thinking—thinking intently of what Mand had said. The seed had been sown, and it had not fallen in stony places, but was destined to take root, and blossom and bear fruit, whether for good or evil times alone would show. On she went, through the garden to the wicket gate, which opened on a rural lane, bright with bluebells and the red flowers of the dead nettle, which ran between orchards, where the great apple-boughs were a mass of white and coral blossom, and where clumps of snowy wood-sorrel grew.

Half-way down the lane she stopped, and shading her eyes with her hand gazed straight ahead for a moment; then with an exclamation of delight she bounded forward, with the grace of a young fawn, to meet the man coming towards her.

"Day-dreaming, Maggie!" he asked gaily, as he caught her in his arms for a moment, and pressed a swift kiss on her soft cheek.

"Day-dreaming! Terry, what do you mean?" she inquired, lifting her exquisite eyes to his, with a bewildering glance.

"Well, your thoughts were far away, little one! Now, don't deny it. Your eyes were glued to the ground, you walked in a listless, mechanical kind of way, and you only just caught sight of me as you stumbled over the gnarled roots of Stretton's oak, which obliged you to look up to see where you were steering to. What were you thinking or rather dreaming about?"

"I don't know!" she answered, slowly.

"Little fibber—come, tell me!" he pleaded, flinging himself down on the bank, softly cushioned with green moss, studded with forget-me-nots and anemones, and drawing her to his side.

"How can I tell you when I don't know."

"But surely you must know what your thoughts were!" he remonstrated.

"No, they were chaotic—a confused mass! Nothing clear or definite."

This was not strictly true, but Maggie hardly cared to tell him what her thoughts were.

"Then, I shall never be enlightened as to what gave you that uncommon air of sadness and preoccupation?"

"No, I suppose not! Don't you ever think without thinking, Terry?"

"No, my dear!" replied the young man, with a gay laugh at her pull. "I can't say that I do. When I indulge in that luxury, my thoughts are definite enough, and are generally about a certain small personage, who is not a hundred miles away now."

"Pooh!" she responded to this pretty speech, making a little noise of derision.

"Don't do that again, or the temptation will be too great. I shall kiss you!"

"I shall do it if I like!" defiantly.

"Of course! Only you know the penalty."

"There, then," repeating the grimace.

"And there, then," he echoed, stooping his head and kissing her mouth, despite the resistance offered by the projecting brim of the old hat.

"Don't, don't!" she cried, pettishly, pushing

away his bearded lips with her soft fingers, and springing to her feet; "how you tease and worry me. You know it annoys me, here in public. Someone might see us!"

"I didn't mean to annoy you, dearest!" he said, humbly, with all the humility that so often goes hand-in-hand with true love, "and don't think it is likely that anyone will witness the performance in this lonely lane. There isn't a living creature to be seen, save the ring-doves and thrushes, and the other little dickies. Surely you don't mind them?"

"No, of course I don't! still you ought to be more cautious. This lane leads to Molyneux Hall, and some people might be passing to our place and see you."

"Well, and if they did I don't see that it would matter so very much. We are engaged one!"

"You forget our engagement is a private one!"

"No, I don't!" he answered, quickly; a frown disfiguring the bright beauty of his face, and calling up that expression to his eyes which altered his whole aspect so strangely; doing away with the habitual debonair look of good-humour, and leaving in its place one almost malignant, and certainly repellent. "I wish I could forget it," he went on, "or change the state of affairs. It puts me at a disadvantage, and—"

"How cross you are to-day!" interrupted Maggie, poutingly. "I shall go home if you are not going to be in a better humour and amuse me!"

"I don't mean to be cross!" he answered, softening at once; "and I'll do anything you wish to amuse you."

"Will you really?" eagerly.

"Yes, really!"

"Take me on the river, then."

"I said I would never do that again, Maggie, since I heard it was Sir Lionel Molyneux's private property, and that we were only trespassers, going on without permission. I don't care to put myself in the way of receiving more impudence from that hound of an agent of his."

"I know you did, but it is all rubbish about Green. I don't care a fig for him. We have kept a boat on their river for over twenty years. The late Sir Marmaduke gave papa permission to do so, and until the present baronet revoked that permission I intend to go on and enjoy myself as much as I can, despite that old curmudgeon, who is a mere dog in office, and who will soon find himself nobody, as the real master is coming home. Now, do take me, Terry, like a dear, good boy. I long to be lying amid the cushions, floating down with the stream!" and she clasped her hands round his arm, and looked up at him beseechingly.

The young man hesitated for a moment, looking down at the brilliant, beautiful face, with its violet eyes, and frame of corn-coloured hair that he loved with such passionate devotion. Then he said, slowly and reluctantly,—

"Well, then, Mag, if you wish it so much I will take you."

"You old darling!" she cried, joyfully, giving his arm a squeeze. "Let us make haste. It will be glorious on the river to-day," and picking up the shabby old sunshade, she tripped along by his side, chattering gaily, in perfect good humour at having gained the day, and got her own way.

"How is it?" he asked, as he walked along beside her, "that you always get me to do just as you like?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," she answered, carelessly, "unless it is because you love me, and that it pleases you to please me."

"That is a very good reason, but it might apply to you as well as to me. You say you love me, yet you seldom or never give up any whim or fancy to please me."

"Oh! that's a very different thing!" she rejoined, quickly, though with a somewhat heightened colour in her fair cheeks; "girls always have their own way, and ought to be spoilt."

"Ought they? Then you have your deserts and are grandly spoilt!"

"Do you think so?"

"I do," he answered, with mock gravity. "You have some strange power over me, which obliges me to spoil you."

"Oh! my lovely foo,  
Tell me where thy strength does lie—  
Where the power that charms me so;  
In thy soul or in thy eye!"

he quoted.

"Don't be a goose," she said, smilingly, as they reached the riverside, and he helped her into the boat.

"Am I a goose?" he questioned, as he dipped the oars in the rippling water, and propelled the little craft along.

"You are sometimes."

"I don't think you ought to reproach me with that."

"Why not?"

"Because you are the fairy whose magic wand transformed me into that most ridiculous of feathered bipeds; and, as I told you before, I don't know how you do it."

And he didn't quite. Yet the solution of the mystery was easy enough. His love for her was strong, passionate, soul-absorbing. Hers for him was weak, changeable; now tender, now indifferent, and it gave her an advantage over him, which she was not backward in using. He loved her better than anything in the whole world; she loved him moderately. He could deny her nothing, she found no difficulty in denying him anything. So in the game of love, at which they were playing, it was likely he would get worsted.

In a dim way his instinct told him that his affection was the strongest and best, and warned him not to give too much, and be content to receive so little, but he hardly heeded the warning. The charm of her beauty was greater than his powers of resistance.

He gave himself up to the delight of basking in the sunshine of her presence, content to pour out the treasure of his heart's beat affection at her feet, and gave no thought to the future, living in the joy of the present, resolutely blind to what he did not wish to see, and giving no heed to the warning.

Such love is wonderful! In its utter abnegation of self, and rarely seen in this prosaic world; at the same time though, it is dangerous, for if thwarted, checked, or abused it may turn to hate—it's very intensity rendering no middle course possible—and in its mad desire for vengeance may sacrifice the once loved object to the gratification of that unholly passion.

Maggie did not know that she was playing with fire, handling edged-tools. She had never troubled herself to gauge the depth or intensity of her passionate Irish lover's nature—feeling, perhaps, that it was a feat quite beyond her moderate powers, and knew very little of his temperament.

"Shall we stay here for a little?" asked Terence, as he ran the nose of the skiff on to the bank, under the shade of a drooping willow.

"Yes, if you like," answered his fair companion, indifferently.

"I do like. And now, Maggie, make room for me. I am coming to sit at your feet," and he threw himself full length in the bottom of the boat, leaning his head against her knee. "Do you love me?" he asked, after a silence of some minutes—a silence broken only by the rustling of the sedge, and the glad voice of the stream, as it went singing over the golden beds of sand.

"Why do you ask me—and why this great affection?" she queried, jestingly, as he took her hand in his and pressed it tenderly.

"I ask you because I like to hear you say, 'Terence, I love you,' and—because—there is another reason."

"What is the other reason?"

"Give me what I plead for first," he whispered.

"Terence, I love you," she answered, hastily, as though eager to hear what he had to say. "Now tell me your news!"

"Well, the reason is—that I am going away."

"Going away!" she echoed, in surprise. "When?"

"Early to-morrow morning."

"And may a body ask where you are going to?" she demanded, recovering almost at once her usual insouciance.

"Of course, dearest. I am going to explain to you the cause of this sudden flight. You remember my telling you about Mr. Balton?"

"Yes."

"Well, at last he has returned from abroad, has bought a palatial mansion in Yorkshire, and has written an imperative command for me to go and paint the frescoes on his drawing-room walls."

"And you intend to obey it, and leave me?" said Maggie, somewhat reproachfully.

"My love, I feel that I ought," replied O'Hara, in an expostulatory way. "He has been such a good friend and patron I could not well refuse; and then he is very rich, and I shall benefit by the transaction in a monetary way. I am anxious now to make all I can, to be enabled to prepare a fitting nest for my bird when she comes to it. Don't be vexed, my dearest," he went on, gently, raising himself on his elbow to look into the beautiful face, that looked the least little bit in the world sulky. "I would not go if I could help it. I shall be wretched the whole time we are apart. I am only happy, now, in your society."

"How long will you be away?" she asked, more graciously.

"Not less than one month, and not more than six."

"Six!" she ejaculated. "That is a very long time."

"It will appear ages to me. But I shall work hard—very hard, and try to get done long before that."

"I hope you will."

"Thanks, dearest. I shall try my best. And absence, Maggie, you know, 'makes the heart grow fonder.' So you will love me better when I return, won't you?"

"I don't know, that is, yes—I suppose so," she answered, confusedly, avoiding the glance of his eye.

"We had better be going towards home," she added a moment later; "it is getting cold," and she shivered from head to foot as though stricken with ague.

"Are you cold?" he asked, with tender concern. "Put this on," and he threw his tweed coat round her shoulder; and, seizing the oars, pulled away manfully, making the little skiff travel swiftly through the sun-kissed waters. "Are you warmer now?" he asked, after they had left the river, and were walking rapidly across the meadows to the lane leading to the Randal's house.

"Yes, thanks. It was only a momentary chillness."

"I am glad of that; I should not like to go away leaving you on the brink of an illness."

"There is no fear of that, I am never ill," and she laughed at the mere idea, strong in her youth and superb constitution.

"You had better not come any farther," she continued, stopping under the spreading branches of a great tree. "It would be no use your coming in to-night; father is at Mr. Traver's, and Laura has a mothers' meeting or some rubbishy affair of that sort, so she and the girls will be occupied. I will say good-bye to them for you."

"Very well, dear," he agreed, submissively, a look of disappointment on his face, "just as you like. But if we are to part here you must say farewell properly, and kiss me good-bye. Will you?" and he looked pleadingly at the beautiful, down-drooped, blonde head he loved so well with such passionate, such absorbing interest.

"Yes!" she answered, without raising her eyes, and in a minute his arms were about her, and he was raining down kisses on cheek and brow.

"You won't forget me, Maggie?" he whispered, gazing at her with the look of a hungry man.

"No, Terence, I won't forget you."

Her voice sounded cold and measured beside his, tremulous with strong emotion.

"And you will always love me as you do now!"

"Yes."

"And be true to me! What shall I do without you during all these long dreary days that must pass ere we meet again? My love, my life, mine alone!" and he strained her to him with tender force, and drew the gold-tressed head down to rest on his breast, while the leaves of the old oak fluttered in the evening breeze, and the grasses swayed to and fro.

The quick-winged moments sped on, and lengthened into an hour. Ah! when the moments are golden bright why will not Old Time stand still, and let poor mortals enjoy them? He never does, but rushes onward with heedless speed, parting those that love sometimes for ever and aye.

"Terence, I must go," she murmured at last, trying to escape from his encircling arms. "It is so late; Kate will be angry."

"My darling, I know I am selfish to keep you, yet it is so hard to part. You will write to me often, little wife?"

"Yes, as often as I can. You know I am a bad correspondent."

"You will try and be a good one, for my sake. Your letters will be all I shall have to live on."

Getting no reply he kissed her again, while a great white-faced owl in the hollow of the tree blinked and winked at them with solemn stolidity.

"Good-bye," he whispered.

"Good-bye," she answered; then flinging his arms about her in a last passionate embrace he tore himself away and strode down the lane.

Once he turned and looked back, and to the last day of his life he remembered Maggie Randal as saw her then, standing in the glow of the sunset, that flashed the western sky with ruddy flame and lit up, as with a halo, the beautiful head and face of the girl he worshipped with all the ardour of his fiery nature.

(To be continued.)

ENGLISHMAN: "What will you take?" Frenchman: "I will take a drop of *se* contradiction." Englishman: "Contradiction! What on earth do you mean?" Frenchman: "Well, you put in *se* whisky to make it strong, *se* water to make it weak, *se* lemon to make it sour, and *se* sugar to make it sweet. Do you say 'Here's to you!' and you take it yourself?"

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## FACETIE.

MISS THIN : "Don't you think my new dress is just exquisite? They all say so." Fanny : "Oh, lovely! I think that dressmaker of yours could make clothes-props look graceful."

FRIEND : "If you have so much trouble with your wife's relations, why do live with them?" Haterow : "'Cause my relations won't have me."

LANDLORD : "I tell you this—Ishan't let you move out of my house till you pay your rent!" Tenant : "Ah! A permanent home is what I have always wanted!"

HICKS : "It is so hard to get anything through Jackaway's head." Wicks : "I know it. Strange, too, when you come to think of it. Surely, there can be nothing in the way!"

"YOU certainly told me to embrace my privileges." "Well, but I didn't tell you to embrace my daughter." "No. But to embrace your daughter is a privilege."

MRS. QUIVERFUL : "Do you know, dear, that I think the baby sometimes cries in her sleep?" Mr. Quiverful (savagely) : "I don't know about that, but I know she often cries in mine."

WILLIS : "What's the most embarrassing thing you know of?" Bills : "To be refused by a rich girl." Willis : "What kind of embarrassment do you call that?" Bills : "Pecuniary."

DENTIST (to old gentleman in the clutches of his chair) : "Mr. Riche, I love your daughter, and she loves me. Are you going to give your consent to our marriage, or shall I give the fangs another twit?"

"If you'll always give me full swing," observed the pendulum, "you will never have any trouble with your hands." "I don't know," replied the clock. "If it wasn't for your going to and fro in my works, I shouldn't have any strikes!"

FIRST DETECTIVE : "There really isn't any evidence against him." SECOND DETECTIVE : "Why did you arrest him?" FIRST DETECTIVE : "Well—er—there isn't any evidence against anybody else."

On board ship a wife was trying to comfort her sea-changed husband, and change the current of his thoughts. "Darling, has the moon come up yet?" she asked. "It has, if I swallowed it," was the weak-voiced reply.

GRATSON : "So you brought suit for damages for injuries received in the smashup. Did you ever get anything?" Dorster : "I never received anything for myself, but I got enough out of the company to support a lawyer in affluent circumstances for several years."

"WHAT do you think of your new neighbour?" asked the hostess of the "sweet" old lady who was calling. "You know I never speak unkindly of anyone. I have nothing to say of her; but I will say of her husband that I feel very, very sorry for him."

MRS. WILDMAN : "I can tell you this, Mr. Wildman, if you continue in your present life of extravagance you'll surely pay for it some day." Mr. Wildman : "I wish, my dear, that my creditors had the same faith in my good intentions."

"MADAM," said the leader of the Best Citizens' League, "I have come to inform you that we have just lynched your husband by mistake." The bereaved woman covered her face with her hands and began to moan. "There, there," the Best Citizen went on; "don't cry. It'll come out all right yet. We expect to get the right man before night."

LADY (excitedly) : "Have you filed my application for a divorce yet?" Lawyer : "No, madam; but I am at work on the papers now." Lady : "Thank fortune, I am not too late! Destroy all papers and evidence at once, please." Lawyer : "A reconciliation has been brought about between you and your husband, I infer?" Lady : "Gracious, no! He was run over and killed by a train this morning, and I want to retain you in my action against the company for damages."

Fair Friend : "So you have really decided not to sell that house of yours?" Fair Hostess : "Yes. You see, we placed the matter in the hands of an estate agent, but after reading his lovely advertisement of our property, neither John nor myself could think of parting with such a wonderful and perfect home."

An enthusiastic gentleman the other Sunday, on leaving an English church, happened to meet one of the churchwardens. "Well, said the man of music, "how do you like the 'Gregoriants'?" "I haven't the pleasure of knowing the family," rejoined the other, and inquired, with naive simplicity, "Whereabouts do they sit?"

Mr. GOODTHING (engaged to Johnny's sister) : "Johnny, I'm going to make you a present. What do you wish?" Johnny : "A box of candy." Mr. G. : "What else?" Johnny : "Another box of candy." Mr. G. : "Oh, wish something else; your little stomach couldn't hold all that candy." Johnny : "Another stomach."

COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE : "The lady talks about honourable dealing; but let her look to herself. My client tells me that she promised to burn every letter she got from him as soon as she had read it." The Court : "What has the witness to say in reply to the defendant's counsel?" Plaintiff : "I thought they might be useful sometimes, and as I didn't want to break my word I didn't read the letters."

"I UNDERSTAND that Fred Blakesley and Mandie Ashbourne have ceased to be friends." "Yes; they don't speak to each other now." "What's the trouble, I wonder?" "He started to propose to her the other night and had just begun to say that his breast was on fire when her father turned the hose on him."

THE TRAMP : "Madam, I saw you give some money a little while ago to an organ-grinder." Mrs. Jones : "Yes; but I can't afford any more to-day." The Tramp : "But I'm a more deserving case, madam. If you give money to a man what plays de organ, surely you can't refuse a man what don't."

"JINKS : "What's all this excitement about?" Winks : "Nothing worth mentioning. Man got knocked down." "Accident?" "Not exactly. One of those men who always catch hold of you and push you out of their way when you happen to meet them at a crowded corner grabbed the wrong man just now. That's all."

MRS. BACKWOODS (after her return from the Metropolis) : "They took me to the theatre—first time I ever was in a theatre in my life—and the way them actors and actresses can pretend they're glad and sorry and happy and heart-broken and angry and so on—I tell you it's a caution!" Neighbour : "Didn't you like it?" Mrs. Backwoods : "Oh, yes, indeed; but it seems to me them people on the stage must be a lot of hypocrites."

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## SOCIETY.

HER MAJESTY will probably return from Balmoral about Midsummer Day.

PRINCESS BEATRICE will be abroad during the Queen's stay in Scotland, and she is to rejoin her Majesty at Windsor early in July.

PRINCESS HENRY OF PRUSSIA will spend the summer between Kiel and Prince Henry's country seat in Holstein, and in September she and her sons are coming to England on a visit to the Queen at Balmoral.

It is thought that next season the claims of Peers and ladies whose ancestresses have attended the Queen's Drawing-Rooms will be considered first, and all further vacancies balloted for by fresh aspirants for the honour of presentation.

THE Duchess of York has promised to open a garden *fité* at Kidbrooke Lodge, Blackheath, on the 29th inst., in aid of the Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava's fund for supplying medical relief to the women of India.

THE Duke and Duchess of Fife, who have divided the winter and spring between Brighton and their house in Portman-square, will now make their residence on the borders of Richmond Park their headquarters until the middle of July, when they intend going to Scotland, to spend a month at Duff House, their place in Banffshire, before settling for the shooting season at Mar Lodge, Aberdeenshire.

THE Tear, who formerly was an enthusiastic cyclist, has about given up the sport, and is having made for himself in Paris a petroleum tricycle. The machine is wholly devoid of ornament, except in the form of a silver escutcheon attached to the left steering bar, on which are emblazoned the imperial arms. In speed it is said to be a record-breaker. A little chariot of wickerwork is being constructed in St. Petersburg for the use of the Tsarina, who will thus be towed behind her consort.

NEWS comes from Cairo that the Khedive intends visiting England this month. Although his Highness was educated principally in Austria, several of his near relatives have been educated in English schools. Two of his first cousins were at Harrow, and another cousin—Prince Azz Hassan—was attached for some time to the 16th Lancers, when they were stationed at Lucknow. Here he kept a very fine stud of racing ponies, as, like the younger brother of the Khedive, he is passionately fond of racing. All the princes of the Khedival house speak several languages, and are most accomplished gentlemen in every way—as the really high-class Turk almost invariably is.

THE Prince of Wales is to be the guest of the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch for some days during the first week in July at Dalkeith Palace. He is to visit the show of the Highland and Agricultural Society, which is to be held in Prestonfield Park, on the south side of Edinburgh, on Wednesday, July 5th, and on Thursday the 6th, and on the latter day His Royal Highness will receive the freedom of the city of Edinburgh. The Queen and Prince Albert stayed for a week at Dalkeith during their first visit to Scotland in 1842, and George IV. was also entertained there by the late Duke of Buccleuch in 1822. Dalkeith, which is one of the finest country seats in Great Britain, was owned for two centuries by the Grahams, and then for three centuries by the Douglases, and was sold in 1842 to the second Earl of Buccleuch. The house is an immense, stately, heavy building, which was designed by Vanbrugh, and it is an imitation of the Royal Château of Léa, in Holland. The interior is well arranged, and the principal rooms are very handsome, while there are splendid collections of pictures and engravings and a choice library. The beautiful grounds and gardens are unsurpassed in Scotland, and the richly-wooded park, which is intersected by both the Esk, extends over a thousand acres, and has many miles of drives and grass rides. The park contains some of the oldest and largest trees in Scotland.

## STATISTICS.

ONLY one man in 203 is over 6 ft. in height. It is believed that in China there is twenty times as much coal as in all Europe.

Over 1,000 people die every year of delirium tremens in England alone.

It is estimated that, at the present rate of growth, London, which now has a population of 5,657,000, will, in 1941, have over 13,000,000.

VEGETARIANS assert that one acre of land will comfortably support four persons on a vegetable diet.

A PEARL DIVER considers it a good day's work if he collects over 200 shells. The record for one day is 1,000 shells.

THE mortality table shows that the month of January and the first month of exceedingly hot weather in the summer are more fatal than any other time of the year.

CALICO print works use 40,000,000 dozen eggs per year, wine clarifiers use 10,000,000 dozen, the photographers and other industries use many millions, and these demands increase more rapidly than table demands.

## GEMS.

CHEERFULNESS and content are great beautifiers and are famous preservers of good looks.

SCRUTINISM is not an end, but a beginning, i.e. the decay of old ways of believing, the preparation afar off for new, wider and better.

ONE part of knowledge consists in being ignorant of such things as are not worthy to be known.

IT is the all-round man of large views and abundant sympathies who learns to look at things from many standpoints, and to realise that goodness and truth and beauty and love are confined within no boundaries, and exhausted by no individuality or race.

WITH consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradicts everything you said to-day.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SAVOURY BISCUITS.—Put 3 cwt. of flour into a basin, add to it half a teaspoonful of salt and 1 oz. of grated cheese. Melt gently  $1\frac{1}{2}$  oz. of butter and stir into it one raw yolk of egg. Be sure the butter is not hot or you will fry the egg. Make a hole in the middle of the flour, pour in the butter and egg, and make all into a smooth, stiff paste. Roll it out  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an inch thick, and stamp it out in crescent shapes. Lay these on a greased baking-tin and bake in a slow oven for about fifteen minutes.

PURÉE DE LENTILLES.—Soak them in lukewarm water for six hours; then put them into a saucepan with cold water, butter, onions and parsley. Let them boil steadily until quite tender, carefully stirring now and then with a wooden ladle. When soft, strain and press them through a tamis pressoir. Melt a piece of butter in a saucepan, and in it brown some onions and shallots, finely chopped; add the purée, with suitable seasoning, moisten with thick gravy, let it simmer gently for a quarter of an hour, and serve hot. To serve them whole, proceed thus: Soak as above, and boil them with a piece of smoked pork. Strain (the liquor will help to make good rice soup). Fry some onions in butter, add the lentils, flour, salt, pepper, spices, and a little broth. Simmer till the liquor has been absorbed, stir in half a teacupful of thick cream, and serve hot.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

IN many European galleries the pictures are dusted by means of air syringes.

NO picture is hung on the walls of the Louvre in Paris until the artist has been dead ten years.

THE lightest tubing ever made is a nickel aluminium. Three thousand feet of this tubing weighs only one pound.

THE Swiss are very thrifty people. Four-tenths of the grown-up people of Switzerland have bank accounts, and beggars are very few.

THE educational system of Denmark is so perfect and popular that throughout the entire country there is not one illiterate family.

AN improved diving-bell of great capacity, moving along the sea bottom by means of screws moved by electricity, is on exhibition in Paris.

THE Royal crown of Persia, which dates back to remote ages, is in the form of a pot of flowers, surmounted by an uncut ruby the size of a hen's egg.

EVERY inhabitant of the Austrian village of Stormbeck is a chess-player. The children are taught to play chess just as they are taught to read and write.

A MOUNTAIN of salt is one of the natural curiosities of San Domingo. The mountain is about five miles square at the base, and is estimated to contain about 90,000,000 tons of salt.

CAGED lions, tigers, pumas, and jaguars take no notice of the men, women, and children present in front of them; but should a dog appear anywhere near the cage their savage nature is roused at once.

THERE are so many languages spoken in the provinces of Austria-Hungary that interpreters are employed in the various parliaments to interpret the speeches of the delegates and make them intelligible to all the members.

ALONG the Adriatic Sea swallows and other migratory birds are caught every year by the hundreds of thousands, and eaten by the Italians, who spread nets in which as many as 300 to 500 of the tired birds are caught at once.

THE ruby in the centre of the Maltese Cross on the top of the British crown is the stone that was given to the Black Prince by King Pedro of Castile after the battle of Najara. Henry V. of England wore it in his helmet at the battle of Agincourt.

THE infusoria, one of the lowest forms of animal life, can propagate their species in three distinct ways. Firstly, by budding, somewhat after the manner of plants; secondly, by the spontaneous division of the animal into individuals; and, thirdly, from eggs.

SIAMESE women entrust their children to the care of elephants, which are careful never to hurt the little creatures; and, if danger threatens, the sagacious animal will curl the child gently up in his trunk, and swing it up out of harm's way upon its own broad back.

A SNAKE does not bite or sting with its tongue. The poison comes through its fangs, from a gland above them. A snake's fang is a sort of hollow tooth, and when the snake strikes at anything, the pressure of this hollow tooth against the gland above it forces the poison through the tooth into the wound the fang has made.

SAN FRANCISCO is gradually sinking into the sea. Surveys made by the city authorities have shown that the average rate of subsidence is two inches a year. The engineers explain the phenomenon by the condition of the ground on which the city is built—sand mixed with decayed vegetable matter extending to a depth of at least sixty feet.

AN observer mentions the instance of a raven having lived sixty-nine years; a pair of eagle owls, one of which is sixty-eight and the other fifty-three years old; a Bateleur eagle and a condor in the zoological gardens at Amsterdam, aged fifty-five and fifty-two; an imperial eagle of the age of fifty-six, a golden eagle of forty-six, and a sea eagle of forty-two; and many birds of the age of forty downward are also recorded.

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## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BRIDE.—Your brother can give you away.

GRANNIE.—Consult the nearest local aural surgeon.

A. B. C.—The imprisonment is not a discharge to the debt.

MIGNON.—At twenty-one years a woman is said to be of age.

CHARLOTTE.—The final "a" in "Louis" is not sounded.

MOLLIE.—It should not be sent with the present, but before or after.

WORRIED.—The servant is entitled to a month's wages in lieu of notice.

EXPLORER.—The first expedition to the South Pole took place in 1867.

PLEASURE SEEKER.—The Great Wheel at Earl's Court is 800 feet in height.

ROBESPIERRE.—The Prince Consort died on Saturday, December 14th, 1861.

ENGAGED.—The third finger of the left hand is the engagement finger.

POPPIN.—Remove by sprinkling with salt and pouring boiling water through.

PADDY.—1846 was the year in which the potato famine was general over Ireland.

WONDERMENT.—There must be a temperature of forty degrees in the incubator.

ADVENTURER.—Torpedoes are said to have been invented by an American in 1777.

DOMESTIC.—Throw a handful of salt on it. This quite removes the objectionable smell.

CAMILLA.—The name is Latin. The first Camilla was a female attendant at a sacrifice.

J. L.—If the tenant refuses to quit after legal notice you can get an order of ejection.

MUSICAL.—It is largely a question of temperament; go to the instrument you like best.

SCHOOLGIRL.—The engagement ring should be worn on the third finger of the left hand.

MUMMIE.—Inquire in the trade. It would be against the rule to comply with your request.

HAMMIE.—Emmanuel was always a favourite name among the Jews, and means the Heart of God.

TRICKY.—It would certainly do you very much harm, and might injure your health permanently.

BRUNETTE.—Striking colours, such as red, or yellow, are most becoming to persons of dark skin.

CONSTANT READER.—Ink-stains may be removed by soaking in milk, changing it as it gets discoloured.

J. F.—The metropolitan police district extends for fifteen miles in every direction from Charing-cross.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Refuse to pay the bill, and if you are country-counted defend the case on the grounds you state.

FAIRY BLOSSOM.—One teaspoonful of ammonia to one pint of hot soda will brighten silver. Polish with chalk.

G. C. T.—Gordon's Christian name was Charles George. He held his commission in the Royal Engineers.

CHEMIST.—Let the article soak in a solution of chloride of lime till the stain is removed, rinse thoroughly, first in ammonia and water, and then in several lots of clear water.

CHRISTINE.—Never wash it either in hot or cold water just before going out. If your skin is very susceptible to cold, rub in a very little cold cream a quarter of an hour before starting, and wipe it carefully off with a soft cloth just before going out.

DOLLY DABBY DIMPLE.—Clothes may be ironed much more easily when they have been dampened and folded several hours.

D. T. S.—You have a right to stand on your own door-step as long as you like, but you must not obstruct the public footpath.

X. Y. Z.—If you took the house at so much "per quarter" you practically agreed to accept and to give three months' notice to quit.

APOLIO.—We think you could safely wait several years. You should get the advice of some instructor in vocal music.

INQUIRER.—The United States ambassador resides in London, the office of the Embassy being at 123, Victoria-street, London, S.W.

PHILOSOPHER.—A man should know when to laugh or smile in company. It shows much more stupidity to be grave at a good thing than merry at a bad one.

NELLA.—Pie-dishes that have been burnt and are black on the bottom may be perfectly cleaned with a little silver sand and then rinsed in cold water.

## HER LOOK.

TIME may set his fingers there,  
Fix the smiles that curl about  
Her winsome mouth, and touch her hair,

Put the curves of youth to count;

But the "something" God put there,

That which drew me to her first,

Not the ills of pain and care,

Not all sorrow's floods accurst,

Can kill the look that God put there.

Something beautiful and rare,

Nothing common can destroy:

Not all the laden load of care,

Not all the dross of earth's alloy;

Better than all fame or gold

True as only God's own truth,

It is something all hearts hold,

Who have loved once in their youth.

That sweet look her face doth hold

Thus will ever be to me;

Joy may all her pinions fold,

Care may come and misery;

Through the days of murk and shine,

Through the roads be foul or fair,

I will see through love's glad eye

That sweet look that God put there.

IN GREAT TROUBLE.—Marriage is legal for a woman at any age above twelve, and will not be invalidated, if it has taken place, by want of parental consent.

SWEET SEVENTEEN.—Going frequently into good society immensely increases and strengthens the power of self-control.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—The lad will not be forced back after being discharged, but if he joins again voluntarily will assuredly be retained.

SUPERSTITION.—There is no reason in the idea that ring-doves bring misfortune in their train, any more than any other birds. Probably the superstition has arisen from the mournful cooing that doves make.

BUTTERSCOTCH.—She should be careful that all advances are from him, and not from herself, as by the law of nature women must be wooed, and are not in any case to be the wooers.

ANXIOUS.—If your painting has not Landseer's signature upon it, it must be a copy, therefore of no special value; such a thing as an original without a signature is impossible.

WORRIED HOUSEKEEPER.—If not from moth or insects, it must be from the decay of the skin. The slipping of the hair might have been caused by leaving it in a damp place. You had better show it to a furrier.

SANDY.—Mix a tablespoonful of patent groats smoothly with two tablespoonfuls of cold water; pour a pint of boiling water over them and boil for ten minutes, stirring well during the time. Flavour according to taste with sugar, nutmeg or salt, the latter being often preferred, as sick people frequently dislike anything sweet.

H. N.—On application to the Agent-General for Queensland, Victoria-street, S.W., all information will be sent on; you can also get for one penny stamp from Government Emigrants' Information Office, 51, Broad-way, Westminster, London, the Queensland handbook, which contains details about the colony; you do not require to serve the shipping company at all; the wages obtainable at farm service will be found in the papers sent on.

YOUNG MISTRESS.—Linoleum should never be touched with either soap or a scrubbing brush. Have it well wiped over with a soft flannel cloth and warm water, drying it carefully with another clean cloth. Skin milk is also a very good thing to wash it with, as it gives it the gloss you wish for. The great rule is to wash linoleum as seldom as possible unless you use skin or sour milk for the purpose, and every now and then polish it with linseed oil or occasionally with beeswax and turpentine furniture polish. Kept in this way it will both look finer and wear infinitely better, for scrubbing wears it out and too much water rots it.

MADELINE.—First provide yourself with a saucer of milk—skin is the best—some good yellow soap, and a piece of soft flannel. You will also need a towel. Spread the gloves on the towel as smoothly as possible. Dip the flannel in the milk, and rub a little soap on it. With this, rub the gloves, working downwards from wrist to fingers, holding the glove firmly meanwhile with your left hand. Continue rubbing till all dirt is quite removed. You will need to rinse the flannel often. At this stage you will probably think the gloves are spoilt beyond hope of recovery. Lay them without rinsing on a clean, dry towel, pulling them as nearly the right shape as possible, and when dry they should be soft and glossy.

A READER'S BROTHER.—The existence in Syria of fishes having curiously abnormal eyes has certainly been recorded. They are fishes with large protruding eyes, or with one eye normal and the other large and protruding, or with eyes half protruding, or with two abnormal eyes unequal in size and development, or with one eye normal, and the other rudimentary. These strange fishes are confined to one short stream formed by springs feeding the small Hasbany River. Less than a hundred feet from the stream are two caves, but only normal eyed fishes could be found in the water adjacent. About one-fifth of the fishes of this stream are affected. The water is cold and tolerably clear, shallow near one bank, and descending toward the other to a depth not exceeding seven feet in summer. No kingfishers or other fish catchers were ever seen in the vicinity.

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